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ALL TO THE COLORS

CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

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THE CALL TO THE COLORS

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ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Jimmy heaved and fought until he could crawl up.
[PAGE 108]

THE CALL TO THE COLORS

BY
CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

ILLUSTRATED BY
W. W. CLARKE

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NEW YORK LONDON
1918

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THE CALL TO THE COLORS

CHAPTER I

SERVICE AHEAD!

"MOTHER," said Jimmy, earnestly, "you aren't going to stop me now, are you? Billy Taylor got the first chance at West Point, and he's smart enough to stick it out. Of course, as the alternate, I might make it later, but—somehow, after talking with the recruiting officer down town, I want to enlist. I told him about Dad's old regiment—rated the best of the Regular Infantry, and he smiled. Said he'd see I got into it all right—in the ranks, a regular bucky, fighting my way up. And there's going to be service ahead—big service! You aren't going to stop me now, are you, Mother?"

Jimmy's mother ran her fingers through his curly brown hair. There was some new, eager light in his gray eyes that the winning of points

in his "prep" school athletics or the sturdy outdoor life which Jimmy loved had never produced. She had seen it in his father—the soldier-father whom Jimmy could hardly remember—but she knew the old call of the blood was here. Jimmy was the only son—the only child, in fact—and Mrs. May might have hesitated, but then she saw the faded button of the Loyal Legion on Jimmy's breast—his father's button as an officer of the old army, which by hereditary right, as the oldest son, Jimmy might wear, but she knew he must win it first by service to his country, to feel content.

"Dad would want me to," continued Jimmy. "Don't you think so?"

"Yes," she answered, "and so do I, Jimmy—after all. I knew when you didn't get the West Point assignment this was what you'd do. You'd ask to enlist in the ranks. And I couldn't ask you not to. We wouldn't feel just right, would we?"

And Jimmy May jumped up and kissed his mother without a word. He knew what it cost her, calm and gentle as she was. She had planned West Point for him; but that chance had gone

to another chap. And Jimmy wouldn't wait. It was the spring of 1916, and already there was talk of the United States Army going to active service to uphold law and order and protect American lives in the troubled southwest along the Rio Grande.

"It'll only be three years, Mother," cried Jimmy, "and it'll be better for me than college! Three years, and before that I'll be after a lieutenancy. I'll land it, too, at twenty-one—an officer, with hard service behind me when the West Point chaps are still shavetails! You watch me—I'm going right downtown to Captain Lawlor and tell him you consented!"

She smiled proudly at him, and with another hug, Jimmy was out of the house and gone. It was going to be lonesome without her boy; she had the means to live easily enough, and hosts of friends in Army circles and out, but Jimmy was all the "family" now. And she knew they would be surprised that she had allowed him to enlist some months under the age limit.

The very next day in came Uncle Lawrence fuming about the news.

"Boy, what's this nonsense!" Then, when he

saw Jimmy May begin to laugh, good old Uncle Larry turned to his sister: "Ellen, this kid of yours in the ranks! Does he know how hard it is?"

"I want it hard!" laughed Jimmy. "So does mother! We talked it all over. Too late, Uncle Larry—I'm an enlisted man of the Regular Infantry now—and going off to the training barracks tomorrow!"

"Ellen!" gasped Uncle Larry, "without consulting any of us!"

"Jimmy and I just couldn't explain it," Mrs. May said quietly. And she didn't say another word. Neither did Jimmy. And after one more grumble, neither did Uncle Larry. He merely took Jimmy's hands.

"All right, then, boy. Nobody's going to help you now—buck your own way—the ranks'll make or break you—and you're the son of your dad!"

"I know. Keep your eye on the ball, Uncle Larry! I'm going to be the fellow who runs with it. It's all settled."

They saw him go down the street swinging along to say good-by to some of his schoolmates. Uncle Larry turned from the window.

"Look at him, Ellen! Thinks he's a man and

a soldier now—at eighteen! Oh, but he's got a lot to learn!"

"He'll learn it. But, oh, Lawrence! It is hard to send him away—he's so sturdy and keen and courageous, but that's the very reason he should go, isn't it? Of course he'll win his way."

A week later Jimmy May, private, No. 2 rear-rank man of a squad of rookies, lined up on the drill ground at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and felt the curt, measuring eye of a Regular Army sergeant go up and down him from head to foot —really felt that glance, Jimmy did, and he stiffened, little finger along the seam of his trousers, heels together, toes out, chin pulled well in, eyes to the front, shoulders back, chest out, motionless as a statue. And he felt rather than saw, the big sergeant walk around him.

"Hey?" grunted Sergeant Milbank, "where did you get all that milit'ry academy stuff, kid?"

"Never attended one, sir."

"No?" Sergeant Milbank looked over a short, fat rookie just in front of Rookie May: "Here, you—Perkins? Drop back in your file. We'll

put this pretty boy up here. Too fine altogether —he'll forget that I gotta teach him anything." The sergeant looked at a card in his hand: "May —Private James Edward May. All right, now, you fellows! Left face, there! See if you can do that! We're goin' to skin you for the next six weeks—school of the soldier, and school of the squad, and anyone of you greenies that thinks he knows anything about milit'ry matters is going to have a tough time of it! You don't know nothin'—see? I'm here to teach you. Dismissed!"

And the rookies' squad fell out awkwardly and ambled away to barracks. The fat soldier who had been dropped back to the rear rank to make way for Jimmy May, touched the latter's arm as they clattered into the big hall.

"Don't mind this raggin'. This N. C. O. has taken to you right off the reel, but not for worlds would he have you think so. He'll be especially insultin' to you for awhile to see how you take it."

Jimmy laughed: "Sure, I know! I'm going to be right on top of the job but not for worlds would I let *him* know it!"

The good-natured face of Private Perkins lit up with a grin.

"You're right-hand cot man to me in barracks, and this solemn old scout, Tolliver, from Michigan, is the left. Now I seen service before with the cavalry, but I ain't letting 'em know it. There's so many rookies in this outfit that they'd hand me some squad to work out, or something. And I'm lazy, Jimmy—like soldierin', but I'm afraid of bein' made a brigadier general. So I conceal all I know, which is a shame because I know a lot!"

Jimmy laughed again. Down the long recruits' barracks fellows were tumbling in and out, some anxiously arranging kits, some inquiring of their equally ignorant fellows about roll calls and when they would fall out to march to the Q. M. C. department to get clothes and equipment. Here and there stood a silent, watchful non-commissioned officer sizing up the lot, and answering questions when he had to. The top sergeant came along and encountered Sergeant Milbank.

"What d'ye make of 'em?"

"They ain't so worse, I reckon."

"They better not be. This outfit is goin' to be assigned to B, C, and F companies right off and they got to hold up with the older men. You know what that means? This battalion is goin' to San Antone, one-third filled with rookies, and it's dollars to dimes that they chase us right into border service. Our company officers are anxious to draw the best of this lot for B Company. Can you pick 'em? It'll help a lot in the work-outs."

"I got my eye on 'em. Several of 'em."

"Hand in some names to the orderly room this afternoon."

And that afternoon, after his first call to Retreat, Jimmy May heard his name called off by the top sergeant and assigned to B Company; and when he stepped out of the recruits' ranks to line up with the new squad he knew that the company officers were watching each rookie to see how he stacked up. A glance and a comment to the first sergeant, and the Company Captain turned away.

"Attention!" snapped the top sergeant, "Now you report to B Company barracks after this call, and that's your home and mess and neighbors for the next three years. You fourteen

rookies here, that's who I'm talkin' to! Best company in the best Infantry regiment in the United States Army, and if any one of you ever forgets that he'll be sorry!"

The line of rookies was silently impressed. Jimmy May was thinking: "Twenty years ago my father was Colonel of this Regiment,—and I'm blessed glad that not one of 'em all knows it!"

"Dismissed!" bawled the sergeant, and off through the dusk the rookies went to their new assignment. Jimmy found his fat good-natured comrade trotting at his side.

"Glad we stuck together," murmured Perkins, "and Tolliver with us. Boyd is to be our corporal I think. Regular fellow, but kind of anxious—keeps you workin'. Think we'll make a pretty decent squad."

"Three years, Perkins! I guess we'll know by that time. Glad I'm here—kind of think there'll be something doing soon!"

The next morning at 5:30, when Rookie May heard the sharp stirring notes of the first call for Reveille, he was sure of it. He was out of

bed on the jump, feeling right and left for his socks in a cool, beautiful spring dawn; and a few minutes later he found himself answering to his name in the long-silent double rank of men drawn up along the barrack. Jimmy answered joyously; he felt as though he belonged to something very big and important and when he saw the beautiful flag bursting out from the staff over the post headquarters he smothered a sigh of content.

"Right where I belong!" he muttered. "And work?—well, they can't give me too much. I want it all—the whole man's job right up against me!"

And Rookie May got it for the next two months. School of the soldier, school of the squad, and into platoon and company formations the greenies were licked, bawled at by alert sergeants, heckled by nervous corporals, growled at and nudged over by impatient two-years' service men or more—slowly the rookies were hammered out flat and built up again as Regular Army men, and what the N. C. O.'s didn't attend to in their education, the overseeing company officers did. They got setting up exercises before

breakfast and they got limbering up for bayonet practice after breakfast, and close and open-order work, and eight-mile hikes, full kit; and foot inspections, paratyphoid and smallpox vaccinations; and work over the rifle ranges and guard-mount duty day after day, week after week, full hours of arduous and painstaking labor, and when it was done they had to clean kit and clothes and guns for inspection so that neither lint nor dust nor finger print was on cloth and steel.

And one day the top sergeant, after the company had been turned over to him for dismissal, walked down and addressed the last four squads of the double rank into which the rookie contingent of B Company had been diligently kneaded.

"See here—it's you greenies that I'm addressin'. You been mauled at and yelled at now for eight weeks or more, and don't know nothin', and I guess you never will know nothin'. It's just distressful to me to see all of you. But you got work ahead now with the rest of us. I hear, and I can tell you, that this battalion is goin' to entrain for the Mexican border in forty-eight

hours just to hold a bit of the line somewhere. It'll be a gay life for you rookies—if you don't weaken."

"Cheers," whispered Rookie May to Private Perkins. "Service ahead!"

"Rookie, I been there—cavalry patrol for fourteen months along the Rio Grande—and I used to watch these doughboys like we are now dubbing along in the dust and mesquite, and I was sorry for 'em. Guess I bet wrong this trip—re-enlisted in the infantry because I thought we were sure going to get into the big war over the water, and the cavalry would never go there. And the first thing they hike us back to that Texas country!"

"Show it to me," retorted Jimmy, "I'm in for the whole game."

Private Perkins eased the weight of his web equipment belt and slid his Springfield into its rack at the head of his cot. Then he beckoned to Tolliver, the silent two-year service man, who was rubbing the wrinkles out of his socks.

"Say," said Perkins, "this kid who's joined Uncle Sammy's happy family is wishful for work. He's the only rookie in our squad, and such dili-

gence as he's been showing of late must be rewarded. I move that he go down to the Exchange and buy three bottles of pop to celebrate him becomin' a soldier with his first service orders."

"Second the motion," said Tolliver. "A little of that border patrol, and this rookie—well, go get the pop, Rookie. We hate to tell you what you'll buck into."

"Sure thing," retorted Rookie May pleasantly, "anything else you fellows want? We'll celebrate that start for hard service."

And back in the barracks Rookie May heard his squad comrades bawling out a doughboy ditty:

"O, the Infant-ree, the Infant-ree,
They march way in the rear!
The Infant-ree, the Infant-ree——
But you always find 'em here!
The Caval-ree, the Artiller-ee,
And the bloomin' Engineers——
Well, they couldn't lick the Infant-ree
In a hundred thousand years!"

CHAPTER II

THE GUARD RUNNERS OF THE RIO GRANDE

SERGEANT MILBANK of B Company lowered his field glasses impatiently and handed them to Private Jimmy May, the rookie, whose fresh young face had not yet bronzed under the southwest sun as deeply as the other regulars on the outpost.

"What do you make of 'em, May—sheep? My eyes are sore with this lava dust, somehow. There, right above the big flume."

Private Jimmy held the glasses steadily. The gray, lifeless slope of the canyon two miles down towards the Rio Grande showed nothing but mesquite and sun-scorched rock. The big flume which carried the water down to the lowlands for the irrigation company was just a darker streak with a black hole where the trestle ended at a tunnel under a projecting point.

Presently Jimmy turned to the Sergeant and

the other soldiers idling under the flimsy shade of an oak on the trail.

"Men, sure, sir! Counted five distinctly, and——"

Sergeant Milbank seized the glasses. The outpost boys all looked up interestedly. The Cuyamaca patrol was the loneliest and hottest spot of all that Company B was detailed to watch against gun-runners and border raids, and not even a sheep herder had been held up and questioned for three days. And since the mysterious smuggling away of the entire carload of arms and ammunition from the railroad siding five miles away at the company post, under the eyes of the Customs officers, the very day after the embargo on arms was declared on the Mexican border, the regular army boys had been instructed to tighten the watch on everyone who claimed to have business near the international line.

"Don't see a thing," grumbled Milbank, "not a greaser's hat, even! Say, May! What are you handing me?"

Private Jimmy took the glasses again. In vain he searched the gray, silent slope. Not a

thing moved save the heat flickers on the canyon walls.

"I saw 'em," he answered. "Five, and where could they have disappeared to in half a minute?"

The big Sergeant got up and dusted his khakis. He turned to Corporal Boyd back in the shelter of the hot little tent. "Second relief at five, Boyd. And I'm going to detail an extra man, and you put him on post down the trail nearer that flume. May, here, seein' that those gazelle eyes of his can pick out men where I only see sheep and not sure of them! Start the detail early, too, for the sun'll be off that slope in half an hour. May, you're on extra duty, and I'll make it up to you on your next morning relief."

Corporal Boyd was getting out the four men of the second relief, and a lazy clatter of bayonets and accouterments came from the guard tent.

When the detail lined up for a curt inspection from the veteran sergeant, Rookie May brought up the rear smilingly as if he had not come off his post up the trail only two hours before. The older men would have grumbled, but Jimmy,

after his two months' setting-up at an army post and two weeks with his regiment on the border, still found novelty in the outpost service.

"Goes after work like a setter pup," muttered Boyd to his superior. "Well, work him—everybody's willin'."

"Won't do for the border till he gets the meat shriveled fast to his bones, and I guess Cuyamaca'll do it," murmured Milbank to the men of the third detail back in the dust of the scraggy oak. "Hot? Wow—worse yet, and even Old Pablo doesn't show up to explain how the irrigation company left this flume in his charge and he must inspect every foot of it, all the same soldier. Bet that old thief ain't been on their payroll for a month! He was over the border last week, Lieutenant Jones said, and there's just a suspicion—hello, what's that?"

His eye had caught a faint film of dust against the pale sky line above the opposite canyon slope. One of the soldiers sat up and pointed.

"There was a man, sir! Must have been lying in the brush watching us!"

They had seen but a glimpse of a vanishing gray figure over the ridge. Every man of the

patrol was watching intently now, but not a thing stirred. Sergeant Milbank shrugged. He looked down in the four-hundred foot depth of the canyon at the dry creek bed.

"Might as well chase after a coyote as try to look him up. Jenkins, I'm going to send you in to company post to report on this business tonight, though we'll all be relieved tomorrow. If there's any funny work goin' on, it ain't on our side of the gulch, anyway."

"Old Pablo said he was going to repair the flume this week and needed some of his peons again," said Jenkins, "but why do they sneak around us if it's all on the level?"

"Next time any of you catch Pablo out on post, bring him in. I'll send him to the headquarters and see if he's still employed to tend ditch for the irrigation people. They abandoned the whole work after that second raid before we came. Pablo's too blamed loyal, somehow, and anxious to hang around with his ditchers. He grins too much, and when he was rounded up to be grilled as to whether he knew anything about the stealing of that car of arms and cartridges, he was that hurt and grieved he almost

wept on the Customs officers! Shucks, that ain't right in a greaser!"

The patrol laughed idly. They were anxious for something to happen. Watching the Cuyamaca trail was the deadest job yet. They didn't even know what their own company might be at over the *mesa,* or what was the latest in the box car looting. The arms had come to the border for the revolutionists just too late to get across, and the local arms agent and the Mexican consignees had been hurt and grieved also. Then, while the Customs guard nonchalantly watched the border points, the whole lot disappeared from the siding three miles inside of good United States territory. And everyone shrugged and nobody knew anything, as usual. All the patrols could do was to tighten up and wait: if the local consignees didn't mind the theft, why the Army couldn't—unless they caught the arms being run over the river.

Sergeant Milbank discontentedly watched Corporal Boyd and the men of the second relief picking their way around a point of the rocky trail down the canyon. Then they disappeared, and he gazed into the twilight gloom beyond, for,

as far as Cuyamaca canyon was concerned, the sun had set for that day. Just beyond the point where the tunnel entered the rock was a glimpse of the yellow *mesas* where the sunshine still lay across the Rio Grande, and the patrol, lying in the shadow of the mighty wall, knew this was Mexico. And more tantalizing still, three hundred feet below them they caught glimpses of the water dancing and surging along through the irrigation flume which clung to its trestles above the dry creek bed. Every fellow in camp longed to take a plunge in that brimming flood, but to reach it was a mile hike down over blistering rocks and thorns and dust. So they stayed at the rim of this miserable canyon and grumbled and did their two hours on guard strung out along the upper trail; and four hours off in which to eat and sleep and wish the next patrol would come over the ridge and relieve their lonely outfit.

Not a soul to stop and question, save Old Pablo, the ditch tender, who shrugged his shoulders and shook his head and never knew anything for *Los Americanos;* not a thing except that he must be permitted to inspect and repair the

flumes and trestles of the irrigation company. He grinned and the patrol growled, but let him pass. As Corporal Boyd put it, this was a right lonesome resort to which fate had sent a fresh-faced young rookie like Jimmy May, from York state.

They dubbed him Gazelle-eyed Jimmy after his luck in spotting the mysterious figures for Sergeant Milbank, and Jimmy grinned patiently at every yarn of rattlesnakes, horned toads, tarantulas and border bandits. The patrol secretly approved of its recruit, but was bound not to say so, until it found the weak spot in his make-up, and "ragged" him because of it.

The third relief lazily discussed Private May as it stretched under the scrawny oak, while Sergeant Milbank, inside the guard tent, scratched away on his report to send in to the company headquarters.

"Wish I liked this here outpost well enough to smile when I got extra duty like this kid does," commented Private Perkins. "I'd feel like a little dusty angel, I would!"

"Put the cub on extra duty, eh?" murmured Tolliver, "and out beyond the post by the big

bend? Why, say, the canyon drops off there so's a goat couldn't climb it! Maybe the kid'll get in some hole where we have to go pull him out with a rope, like Beavers did when he stepped into quicksand up to his neck, and we told him he'd be courtmartialed for leaving his post on the river bank."

"Jimmy's too wise and cautious for any more foolishness. We coiled a dead rattlesnake in his blanket, and instead of yellin' when he crawled in, what did he do? Just reached over and sneaked it into Casey's trousers, and next mornin' Casey was the one who did the yellin'."

"Pickin' on me," growled Private Casey, "how'd he know I was the one man in the mess who just couldn't stand sight of a snake?"

Meantime Private Jimmy May had toiled on cheerfully behind the regular detail. Man by man the four sentries were met, the perfunctory challenge given, the new guard stationed, given his usual brief instructions by Corporal Boyd and left while the others hiked to the next post. There was nothing to report. The first relief had seen nothing, heard nothing in all the hot, dusty, sleepy two hours on their beats.

"Sand fleas and chiggers," grinned the last perspiring sentry, falling in behind Private May as he was relieved, "kept me so busy scratchin' myself I'd let Villa's whole outfit go by without noticing. Boy, they'll bite up that nice little New York summer resort tan of yours so the Colonel won't know you when we get back to the regiment. It'll worry headquarters to see how peeled you're gettin'."

"Isn't worrying me," retorted Jimmy, "and if it does you, I'll speak to the Colonel about it. Expect to meet him some day personally."

"Pinnin' medals all over you, I reckon?"

"Sure!" grinned Jimmy, "have 'em to give away—"

"Attention!" growled Corporal Boyd. He pointed blankly at a pathless waste of huge broken rock lying beyond the last post, which completely hid the lower end of the canyon. "May, that's your beat! That doesn't worry you either, eh?"

"Well," answered Jimmy, "I can't keep an eye on the tunnel where we saw those fellows, Corporal, and I remember Sergeant Milbank wanted me stationed where I could do just that."

The tall Corporal stared at Private May, amused but a trifle angry; the cub was telling him his business, was he! "Ain't tough enough yet for you, eh? Well, I'll find a post that is!"

And with a grin, he led the way, leaving the detail, but with Private Jimmy at his heels. Down the last of the recognizable trail they slipped and clambered, reached a huge projecting point and still the lower canyon, and the tunnel mouth was below the slope. Corporal Boyd wiped his perspiring brow. He had a sudden discomfited idea that Jimmy was laughing at him behind that sun-peeled nose of his. Sure enough, Milbank had told him to post Private May where he could watch the end of the flume. So he set off on another wild scramble around and over lava rocks and boulders to another point. There he got a glimpse of water in the flume, but no tunnel. Corporal Boyd growled impotently. On he hiked, growing angrier every minute: he would march that cheerful recruit clear to the Rio Grande now before he would own up that he couldn't carry out his superior's instructions. It was not good tactics to take a single sentry away off on

post half a mile from the next man, but Corporal Boyd was going to teach Private May a lesson. On they struggled, going downward every foot, and finally, rounding another sheer wall of rock, the wearied Corporal stopped. Half a mile down the gloomy canyon was the black, round hole of the tunnel, with the trestlework carrying the flume full of water straight into it. There was the spillway, too, by which the flood could be diverted down in the former creek bed when required, and beyond the narrow crack one could see the sunlight still bright on the yellow *mesas* of Mexico across the Rio Grande.

"Here is your post, sir," said Corporal Boyd with punctilious politeness, "relief at seven—I suppose. Watch and report on anyone seen about the spillway and tunnel. You know your orders. Now watch lively."

He saluted and was turning away when Private May spoke.

"The other end of my post, sir—just where——"

The Corporal turned and waved his hand blandly. "From here to—to Mexico City! Now, here, Son—cut out this joshin'—you're too

blamed good-natured. You're too—too—well, cut it out, anyway!"

"Yes, sir," answered Private May gravely. "Too—too much, sir!"

Scrambling up the mountain wall, Corporal Boyd turned once to stare off in the deepening gloom of the great canyon. "Say, once it gets real dark, a relief couldn't get down to this cub in a week! And if he moves around anywhere he'll break his neck!"

But Corporal Boyd found his way back to the waiting patrol. It would be Corporal Schneider's duty to post the next relief, and Schneider would have to worry over that. So, rather pleased with himself, Corporal Boyd brought his weary squad into camp and reported vaguely to the Sergeant, who made a few sleepy inquiries.

And away down Cuyamaca canyon, Private Jimmy May dropped the butt of his Springfield on the bare rocks, scratched a fleabite under his hot leggins and looked at that black hole in the canyon wall.

"T'other end of my post is Mexico City, is it? Well, then, I'm going to hike on a bit and have a close look at that tunnel!"

So more leisurely he picked a way down the steep slope, avoiding the sheer places, and working to where he finally came out not a hundred yards above the last of the flume. He could hear the water dashing into the tunnel, and sat down to enjoy this one cool sensation in all hot, dusty Cuyamaca. The twilight was deepening down there, the gray wall hid all details, and Jimmy was just pleasantly easing his belt when a noise came like the water in the flume had slowly been checked. And then, suddenly, a new note broke, a swift rush, and the next minute this was a roar, and before Jimmy's eyes a white curve of leaping water struck down in the canyon bottom below the trestle. He sat up in surprise. Then he crept a few feet from the concealing boulders.

"The spillway's opened!" he muttered. The next instant he made out a figure on the little platform working at the iron wheels that raised and lowered the diverting gates. Wider grew the arc of water from the spillway's end, slower and slower ran the flood into the tunnel. And Jimmy, lying flat on the canyon edge now, staring down, saw the short, dumpy body of Old Pablo, the ditch tender, standing idly watching

his work. In a few moments the water had all receded from the tunnel and the spillway flood was roaring.

Private Jimmy stared the harder. Twice before he knew Pablo had opened the spillway, and had explained amiably to the patrol up the canyon that he had to repair the flume. But here he was clearing out the tunnel at dusk without a single one of his motley peon laborers with him!

"Old boy," whispered Jimmy, "I'll have a confab with you!"

Pablo lighted a cigar and sat on the edge of the flume. And for a quarter of an hour, Private May lay still as a rock, wondering when Pablo would move up or down, and what he was about.

Presently, above the tumult of the water, Jimmy thought he heard a shout. And the old Mexican slid off his perch, dropped to the bottom of the eight-foot flume and walked leisurely over the wet planks into the tunnel. Then Jimmy saw another figure, and the sight made him thrill. This was a short-jacketed, sombrero-covered fellow carrying a rifle, and with bandoliers of cartridges slung under his arms!

"Over the border!" gasped Jimmy, "one of Villa's crowd, sure as shooting!"

Pablo and the outlaw were talking, smoking and pointing into the tunnel. Another moment and they disappeared into the dripping hole, leaving a very excited young American Regular sitting up and perspiring with his discovery.

After a moment Jimmy glanced up the chaos of rock down which he had silently come. "Say, it's almost dark under the ledge! I—I—couldn't get back to camp in an hour! But I'll have to report—yes, sir!"

Then he lay out again, noiseless as a cat, and watched the tunnel. He was seized with a great curiosity to know what and who was in it. "Ought to find out," he argued, "then we'd know how many we're up against and how to handle 'em! I want one look into that tunnel!"

A moment more, watching the aperture, he was swinging down hand over hand, on the rocks, until he was level with the flume just above the spillway gates. But the gates and mechanism on the platform kept him from looking into the hole. So he swung on down until he was in the dry mesquite and dust below the trestle, and then

he stole along until he was fairly under the diversion gates. The roar of the spillway was not twenty feet to his left; water dripped all about him, and after five minutes' wait to satisfy himself that no one was below, he began to crawl up the crossed timbers to the bottom planking of the big flume. Then he got a hand to the slimy iron braces up the side and drew himself up and then cautiously over the narrow runway along the wooden box. Carefully he shoved his army rifle ahead, pointing towards the tunnel not twenty yards away. But no one was at the end of the flume, and when Private Jimmy peered over into the wet structure he saw nothing. He was just beyond the diversion gates which turned the water off into the spillway chute, and any noise he made was drowned in the roar of the water down the canyon slope.

"Got to see what they're up to," muttered Jimmy. "Sergeant Milbank will want a report that he can work on, so I'll just scout around awhile."

Lying flat on the runway, he tried to crane his neck over the flume planking to get a sight into the tunnel. He caught sight of a shadowy

figure up in the gloom, then another. Men were busied midway through the rocky cut. Lower and lower Jimmy put his head and shoulders. Finally he could see the other end of the tunnel about two hundred yards away and, like a picture, the red-yellow glow of the sunset upon the *mesas* across the river and a bit of the Rio Grande itself a mile beyond where the canyon opened to the valley. But what made Jimmy gasp again were the silhouetted figures against the light. There were at least twenty men in there and they were going and coming in a long line from some recess midway in the tunnel to the farther end, and each man was laden with some burden as he staggered in the wet, rocky pools!

At the other tunnel mouth, armed guards, idled as the peons worked. The pile of boxes, long and square, was growing larger and larger, almost shutting the light out. Jimmy watched the crowd, fascinated by his discovery.

"Rifle cases!" he murmured, "and cartridges —the whole carload lot, I do believe! Mexicans must have run the stuff up in the hills two weeks ago and been slipping it into the tunnel by midnight packers. That's why Pablo has been shut-

ting off the water every day or two, pretending he had to inspect the flume. But what are they doing now, lugging it out to the other end—with Villa's men over the line! Going to rush it into Mexico tonight, that's what! They can pack the stuff down the big flume to where it ends in the bottom land ditches and then sneak it into the river bed. And the bandits can fight off any patrol that happened to discover 'em—there's enough of 'em to stand off a company in that brush!"

Jimmy lay grasping his rifle tighter as he quickly thought out the game. He had to give the alarm—get back to the outpost and have warning sent to his company commander. The soldiers would have to come away around the *mesa* and strike at the bandits from the river, for they never could get down Cuyamaca canyon in the dark where Jimmy had come. And then Jimmy sat up, checking his mutter of chagrin.

"And say, *me* up that trail again? I couldn't make it in *two* hours!"

For he knew that he had crossed half a dozen little *arroyos* running down the canyon slope, and which one would lead him to where he could

gain the high trail to camp, he didn't know. He hadn't thought of getting back in the excitement of his first discovery. If he tried to go up the creek bed he would only find himself at the bottom of the canyon a half mile under the outpost. He might fire his rifle up there, but even if the patrol could get to him, they never could cut off the bandits from the river. No, Jimmy dispiritedly thought, every Mexican on both sides of the line would be laughing at the way the loot was sneaked out of Cuyamaca canyon under the noses of the *Americanos.* And Sergeant Milbank would be "in bad" with the regimental officers; nothing is so hard to explain as failure! The Colonel would demand why the outpost, which had been discontented because there was nothing to do, had not scouted out every yard of rock in the canyon. The longer Private May thought of it, the worse it appeared. The Mexicans were certainly going to rush that stuff over the border this very night, and Jimmy was bound to stop it some way. The light was lessening in the canyon every moment; the gray, gloomy walls seemed to close not half a mile up the creek bed. Looking again into the tunnel, Jimmy saw the work busily

proceeding. Once Old Pablo approached the hole nearest Jimmy, glanced out carelessly and sauntered back, unknowing that Private May's Springfield muzzle covered every move of his.

But when he disappeared, Jimmy crawled back on hands and knees until he reached the little platform where the winches worked the wooden flume gates. He had to make a break for camp, it seemed, and take a chance on raising an alarm that would send the cavalry round to intercept the bandits. So, with another look at the tunnel, he grasped one of the iron wheels to descend the trestle.

And then the surge of that fierce water against the gate under his feet suddenly gave Private May the most brilliant idea that ever hit him.

"Man, I could drown 'em all out, bag and baggage, if I could shut that spillway and turn the water in. The stolen ammunition—it would be knocked all over the lower flume with eight feet of water on it—and Villa's outfit, too!"

And laying down his rifle, kicking out the ratchet which held the shaft at the platform, he began to heave around and around on the iron wheel, just as a brakeman does on top of a freight

car. He had seen Old Pablo lift the gates once, and it was simple enough. A counterweight below the platform helped and the spillway gates closed with the same power that lifted the main flume gates. Almost before he knew it, Jimmy felt the shock of the checking water in the flume spillway, and then a sudden surge and spurt as it shot from under the slowly-raising gate. Up, up, the tide shot and, as he dragged at the wheel, he saw a two-foot flood leaping away and down the tunnel.

Then a muffled shout from the black hole, and the next second, the crack of a Mauser. The bullet was *"zing-zinging"* past Jimmy's ear when he dropped flat on the platform, seizing his rifle and lying head to the tunnel. Ducking inside the flume above the foaming rise of water, he got one last glimpse into the flooding tunnel.

Men were running this way and that, dropping packs and yelling. Two of the outlaws were firing wildly up the passage, and Old Pablo was staggering waist-deep in the flood. He was the nearest to Jimmy's end, but the next instant the surge of cold water engulfed him also.

"Zing-zing!" another bullet found its way out,

and another drove into the flume work, sending stinging splinters of wood into Jimmy's face. He shook his head and whooped and drew his rifle sight closer on the tunnel mouth. Then, at last, breasting the flood and clinging to the rocky walls, Old Pablo squirmed desperately out. He reached the first flume cross-piece and hung there yelling.

Jimmy jumped up and covered him with his gun. "Come out of that, Pablo! I got you!"

Then the ditch-tender saw him at last. He shook his fist sullenly, then stared back in the tunnel. Not a packer nor bandit could ever breast that fierce rush of water; every last one of them had been swept off and out into the lower sections of the flume, fighting and grasping at the sides. Jimmy could just imagine it, and as for saving the rifle cases and cartridges, the mountain water would be foaming over them eight feet deep in the tunnel mouth and flume.

Private May was standing over Pablo, circling his rifle's muzzle over the renegade's fat face as he looked up. "Come on, old boy! You know the trail back to camp, and I don't. *Pronto,* Senor! *Vamoose! Vamoose!*" That was all the

Spanish Jimmy knew, but Pablo knew it. When they were scrambling up the canyon slope again, Pablo turned and shook his fist at the flume.

"No good!" he shouted. "No more I work for dat water company Americanos!"

"I guess you don't," retorted Jimmy, "not for a while, anyhow. And I hear the third relief yelling up there. They think I've fallen over a cliff and broken my neck—unless they heard Villa's men shooting!"

Half an hour later the perspiring patrol met Private May and his prisoner on the high trail. The sentries had heard the racket and called the guard. Sergeant Milbank had them all turned out and struggling and scrambling down the slope in the dark.

He stared hard at Private May. Corporal Boyd turned a grim look on Jimmy. "What you doin' half a mile off post, man?"

"You told me to keep going—all the way into Mexico if I wanted!" Then he saluted and told them all. Sergeant Milbank broke in and whistled ere Jimmy's tale was half done. "Right about! Up that trail in single file, fast as ever a doughboy hiked it. Jenkins, you keep on right

to company quarters and report. Maybe they can catch those fellows at the line, unless May washed 'em clean over into Sonora! This is awful! This ain't solderin'! We ain't runnin' no bath-house, May, for to wash the enemy like you think. Forward, there—forward!"

The detail scrambled away in dead silence and came wearily into the outpost camp. Sergeant Milbank watched Private Jenkins jog off through the dark to report the affair to the company headquarters. Then he looked at Rookie May sorrowfully again. He repeated that the United States Army had come down to the Rio Grande to fight bandits, not to wash them. It was a fine report to make to the Colonel and all.

But the next day Rookie May had to make it in person to a group of grave and attentive officers. He was told that after the water in the Cuyamaca flume had been turned off every last case of the stolen arms and ammunition had been recovered, though the gun-runners had escaped, and the Colonel added some commendatory words that made Rookie May blush and merely answer: "Yes, sir!"

And when Jimmy May rejoined his company

to learn that it was ordered to a new base down the Rio Grande, Private Perkins, his bunky, and the camp gossip, whispered some even more pleasing words:

"The outfit," murmured Perkins, "thinks that you'll do—for a rookie."

CHAPTER III

A WILD RIDE WITH OLD PABLO

THROUGH the pelting sand and dust storm which all but hid the dim rows of army tents stretching back from the railroad station, Private Jimmy May watched the last of B Company clamber into the dingy day coaches bound through El Paso to the lower valley after the monotonous weeks of patrol duty on the rough and mountainous borderland.

"Say, Kid," grumbled Private Perkins, rubbing the sand from his lips and turning to his silent comrade, "I hope it's better down Texas way—anyhow, it can't be worse. But they say there when it rains, it rains fleas and chiggers. But up here it rains the tops right off the sand hills, doesn't it, Jimmy?"

"Anything for a change," retorted Jimmy cheerfully, "but I wish we'd pull out. What's the wait?"

"Prisoners. Here they come now—some

greasers the cavalry picked up, and we're taking 'em down to division headquarters. And Milbank must have it in for you and me, Jimmy, to put us on this fool guard detail."

"I don't know." Jimmy watched the five shambling Mexicans come along the platform under escort of Corporal Boyd and his squad all muffled against the whipping sand as one would against a Dakota blizzard. "I'd rather ride in the baggage car with the prisoners than back in those crowded coaches—it'll be awful with all the windows tight against this dust."

"Baggage car—nothing!" yelled Perkins. "It's outside for us! One on the tender and one on the blind—and I hope you get the blind! It's fierce what they hand a rookie, Jimmie. I'll bet when they relieve you, you won't know you're a human being. You'll wish you never enlisted to fight and die and eat beans and such for your blessed country!"

Jimmy, the lithe, lean lad with the gray eyes and such distressingly good complexion that not a man of his mess could ever become quite reconciled to it, listened to Perkins quietly. Perkins was the chronic kicker of B Company, and al-

ways chose the latest rookie as the recipient for his gossip and complaints. He was a good educator, was Private Perkins, on how not to do things, and Jimmy wondered how it was that he was always being paired off with Perkins on extra duty and policing and the like.

"It's funny, Perky," answered Jimmy, "but I like beans. Of course there's too much sand in 'em down here, but so there is in everything. Say, look at that old fat boy there! Honest, it looks like——" Then Jimmy stepped nearer and slanted back the prisoner's huge, heavy hat.

"Pablo!" he whooped. "Old friend from up Cuyamaca!"

Corporal Boyd was loading his bulky old prisoner with scant ceremony into the baggage car, now half given over to the battalion's camp dunnage.

"Same old gun-runner that you give the water cure to, Jimmy. The bull pen for him now until this Mexican mess is over, but he ought to be shot. I guess maybe he loves you personally, eh?"

The imperturbable Yaqui looked down from the car, and gave Private May a long sullen stare, then a shrug and a mutter. He turned into the

dark recess, and Boyd grinned at Jimmy. "He means he'd like to meet you after dark some time —yes, he would."

Rookie May had been ragged so much over his exploit with the Cuyamaca gun-runners that he deprecated any reply. Boyd turned to his squad.

"Attention! Crane and Frazier up with the prisoners; Perkins on the engine tender; May, end guard on the day coach. You other fellows back to the company!" Then as he was watching Perkins laboriously climb to the engine cab he muttered to Rookie May: "You get the worst of it, Jimmy, but Perky would tangle his gun in his legs and fall off that blind sure at the first curve. And I was ordered to put a man on there to look out at the stations. Nobody's to approach this prisoners' car, mind, when we make a siding; and none of our fellows are to come out that coach door on the platform. Now, Sweetie, I love you, and the Good Book says 'em that gets loved, also gets chastened. That's why we picked you for this flyin' ash barrel."

Rookie May was impassive. He was used to being "kidded" for his youthful skin, but he took

the gaff and said nothing. Secretly he was sure that Corporal Boyd was his best friend in all B Company—and to conceal it took some over-drastic means.

When he had climbed to the platform of the first coach he murmured: "Ash barrel's right, all right! Gee, what a hole!"

For as the train pulled out over the darkening, storm-swept New Mexican plain eastward, he felt a literal volley of gravel, dust, sand and cinders pour over the car tops down upon him. He staggered and grasped the platform rail, rattled the lock of the coach door, found it locked, tried to peer in the end windows and found them piled high with B Company's luggage; then he swung across the pounding bumpers and sat down under the vain shelter of the overhanging roof of the forward car in which rode Boyd and his two guards with the prisoners.

"Joke Number 2226," muttered Jimmy, "about anyone wanting to open that door and come out—he'd get an eye-ful of sand he'd remember!"

He dragged up his overcoat collar to shut out the grit, but it was down his neck and up his

sleeves and in his socks in a minute, and he sat in dismal silence while the rattly old troop train of five coaches and the baggage car bounded and banged on in the hurricane. Half an hour of this, and the train stopped at some invisible way station. An officer with a file of men came forward from out of the dust whirls. Three new prisoners, gathered up by the patrols, were added to Corporal Boyd's reluctant care. Private Jimmy had clambered down and stood dutifully on guard until the side door was shut, then he saluted the hurrying lieutenant and climbed back on the "blind." He hadn't seen the chubby Perkins at all. It was dollars to doughnuts that Perkins was taking it easy in the shelter of the cab with the train men, but Jimmy May was too conscientious. He remembered what he had told his mother when he finally got her consent to allow him to enlist six months under the military age: "I'm going to carry the load and not whine."

Jimmy just found it impossible to take anything easy, but then he was new to the Regulars as Perkins frequently reminded him. Still Jimmy had had his dreams of nice, clean service in balmy tropic isles where fellows loitered and

worked and fought and looked as they did on the Government enlistment posters and magazine covers. Down on the border, he spent most of his time, he reflected, just trying to get the grit out of his ears—and keep his temper against the joshing of his mess.

He was crouching snug against the blind end of the baggage car, shielding his face against the hail of sand and gravel when, above the roar of the train and the storm, he heard another noise. It might have been a shout, a shot, muffled and blurred, or a heavy blow against the car end from within.

And at once Jimmy was alert. He shoved his face forward, then carefully swung out from the platform for a glance toward the engine. And that one instant saved the life of Rookie May of Company B.

The next second there was a tremendous explosion that almost hurled him loose from his clutch on the hand rails. A great sheet of flame and smoke broke above him. The baggage car end was literally blown to kindling, and Jimmy hung stunned out from the iron lower step. The car door had opened now, and suddenly three

fighting figures were hurled by a lurch of the train out to the storm-swept night. Jimmy crouched back on the car step. One instant the flame from the car whipped over him, and then the wind sent it flowing out to the opposite side, and the next it billowed against the broken windows of the troop coach behind.

Jimmy's hat was gone, his face was blackened, his hands scorched and seared, but between his knees was gripped his precious army rifle.

"If I'd been on my feet—good night!" gasped Jimmy, "talk about luck!"

Slowly he wormed back upon his knees, got his breath and looked up. That mysterious explosion had simply blown the near top and the end of the ancient baggage car clean out. As far as Jimmy could see the interior was a mass of flame fanned and twisted by the hurricane, but all swept back through the broken end against the day coach. Swinging out, he could see the open side door, the glare of the fire and the engine beyond. If guards and prisoners were not killed they must be cooped at the farther end of the car safe a bit from the fire.

Jimmy knew he was unhurt save for a few

burns. He beat out wisps of flaming stuff that struck his shoulders, knelt lower and thought swiftly of his dilemma. If Boyd needed help against the Mexicans, Private May's business was to help him, but hanging to an iron car step that was growing hotter and hotter as the sheet of flame from the car widened, Private May didn't see his way to assist.

"That old wooden shack will burn clean to the trucks," he reflected. "Why don't they stop the engine?"

It struck him that the train was roaring on faster and faster through the dark. Glancing down the line of coaches under the smoke pall and the dust, Jimmy saw a lantern waving from one of the far vestibules. And then, nearer, he saw that the wooden end of the coach across from him was smoldering under that avalanche of fire poured against it. That made Jimmy gasp. There were four hundred men in the coaches behind. If the train was not stopped the wind would whip the fire through it clean as a whistle! Why didn't they stop! What was Perkins doing forward with the engineer and fireman that he took no action?

"I'll bet they're in trouble, too!" thought Jimmy. "Old Pablo's gang has pulled some game on 'em, and got the engine. Of course they won't stop till they see a chance to make a getaway!"

And Private May roared his impotent wrath. Here was a battalion of the best infantry regiment in the whole army, cooped up and helpless at the hands of less than a dozen ragged outlaws gathered in from the brush on suspicion! Even if it resulted in no tragedy, it would make the border laugh from end to end, Mexican and Gringo alike!

Jimmy rubbed his blistering hands across his blackened face. He, somehow, hadn't considered his own danger yet. Once when the train curved off so that the slant of the storm drew the flame across his side of the track, he had to grovel down, hanging with his face below the level of the last step in order to get his breath. But he still clung to his army gun. When the train straightened out he could crawl up a bit. But the iron rail was too hot to touch.

"Ow," said Jimmy. "Fine business! Step's getting hot, too!"

He swung his rifle around the hand rail and hung to it, barrel and stock. Then he fought the fire out of his hair and coat. And after the busiest five minutes Private May ever spent either in the army or out, he was able to glance back.

That first coach was catching fire sure now! The flame had drawn in the broken windows among the luggage. Undoubtedly the boys were fighting it at the near end. Of course they could retreat and cut the train below, but Jimmy knew that would not be done save as a last resort, for the officers were bound to see what had happened forward. But Jimmy suddenly resolved he would cut the coaches off on his own hook. There was still a chance for him to fight his way through the flame to the coach end, perhaps; dive through the smoldering window and rejoin his comrades. But that wasn't orders, thought Jimmy. He was on the guard detail, and his business was with Corporal Boyd through thick and thin.

But he saw now that the only hope of saving his own life was to disconnect the train. The back heat, if that coach got afire, would finish him

where he crouched. And still the train lurched crazily on through the dust storm, slowing not a bit. Jimmy was sure the Mexicans had captured or killed the trainmen as well as the guards. Otherwise the train would be stopped to give the soldiers a chance of escape.

Slowly, with painful deliberation, Jimmy twisted his body through the platform rail, his knees gripping the edge while he reached for the couplings. The air connections offered some support that kept him from the blast of fire, but there he hung, almost head down in the storm of cinders and gravel, while he groped and hunted for the couplings. It was an old style connection, simple enough, but to release the pin in that bumping, jarring space between the cars was agonizing. The train was on a down grade which helped some. But it was only after many efforts, while he knew his clothes were burning from the cinders above, that Jimmy jerked the coupling free. Almost at the same time he heard the crack of the air connections. And, although Jimmy did not know it, their release automatically set the brakes on the runaway coaches behind. All that Private May knew, as he

dragged himself back by a leg grip and his fingers over the platform edge, was that a space was widening slowly between the shattered car he was on and the smouldering coach that carried Company B.

When he "got set" again on his lower step perch he was done up and burned again on the elbows and neck as well as his hands. But critically he looked up at the flaming fragments of the car panels above him. When the fire widened to take in the whole end it would get Private Jimmy.

"Of course I can jump when I have to," he grumbled, looking down in the yellow scud of sand and light-checkered desert, "but that's quitting against orders! Stick it out, Jimmy—trust God an' keep your powder dry—though they don't need that last down in Texas!"

So Rookie May humped around and tried to sit on his shoes. Anywhere else the car steps began to burn him uncomfortably. "Talk about a cat on a hot brick?" murmured Jimmy. "Nothing to it with this stunt!"

Back in the dust-driven dark he saw a dim, brown glare. That was the burning end of the

troop train rapidly being lost as its momentum decreased, and the locomotive at the same time gathered headway.

"Down grade," thought Jimmy, "but where are we heading to? If those fools don't know how to manage an engine, or if they don't pay any attention to station signals—and it's a cinch they won't—why—why—well, we'll hit something, that's all!"

He watched the car corner above him burning steadily away, nearer and nearer, lower and lower. The wooden siding had been all riven and twisted by the explosion, and the fragments burned off and scattered down upon him or were whirled off on the wind. The heat was not so intense since the day coach had been cut away, but still everything of metal blistered the touch of luckless Jimmy.

He grimly reflected that it was just about time for his "relief." And the only way he saw to get it was to quit post and dive head first into the border desert, which would be highly unmilitary and against all precedent.

"Hanged if I will—not till I have to!" he murmured. "A fellow would die down there in the

sand even if he didn't break his neck when he lit."

So he hung to his hot roost, wondering just what had happened to Corporal Boyd. There had been a rattling old scrap in that car and some fellows went off; and, either by design or accident, some explosives in the luggage stored in one end had gone up. So far Jimmy reasoned it well enough, right from the hot, glowing facts, but he was wishful to know more details. Where were Tim Boyd and Perkins, the grumbler? And the engineer and fireman? Private Jimmy sat and worried. Whatever turned up now he and his army gun would have to handle it alone, it appeared, for Company B and the battalion were miles back in the storm-swept desert, undoubtedly absorbed in their own troubles.

Jimmy's trouble now was the curve of the unknown right-of-way and the steady lowering of that flame from the burning car end. Pieces of wood broke off and sailed down on him along with bits of smouldering woollen blankets and stuff from the dunnage. He squirmed around and fought these away and scraped them from the metal steps, choking and gasping in the

fumes. The draw of the main fire was nearer now, and Private Jimmy knew that it was a matter of minutes when he would have to jump out in the flying dark and quit his post, orders or no orders. The boy who stood on the burning deck had nothing on Rookie May on his hot iron car steps.

He crouched, looking uncertainly down in the uncertain light. Then he tightened his belt.

"Well, here goes!" he muttered.

And then with a hollow roar the train shot over a wooden trestle. The noise startled Jimmy. He was looking now into deeper darkness. Then the engine was across the small *arroyo* and thundering on. But Jimmy saw huge boulders indistinctly along the tracks. That was no place to jump! Then the train heeled groaningly along a sharp curve, and a rock wall grew out of the gloom. Jimmy knew nothing whatever of the country but he guessed suddenly that the runaway was out of the barren *mesas* and approaching the broken land nearer the frontier line.

"Well, if those fellows intend to make a getaway, here's where they'll do it," he reasoned. "I'll stick a moment longer!"

And in something more than a moment he was nervously sure that the train was slowing. There came a shudder and a clatter of brakes applied, and the burning car wobbled unsteadily, showering more cinders off in the gale and down on the refugee upon the car step.

The locomotive was grinding to a stop when Jimmy weakly flung himself down from his perch, struck gravel, floundered along it and fell. He didn't need the mouthful of dust that he got at all, but at length he was able to sit up and draw his gun from under his legs. A hundred yards off in the opaque shade was the glare of the burning car. Beyond it a rocky wall loomed up. On Jimmy's side of the track was a gentle, rock-strewn slope with mesquite bushes here and there, and along this Jimmy crawled parallel to, but a hundred feet away from the stopped engine. He could hear voices now, guttural shouts and orders, and then saw figures of men outlined against the fire.

"Pablo!" he whispered at sight of one squat, heavy figure, and sitting back, he drew his rifle silently up for action. Five of the Mexicans were in sight now, and plainly had not a suspicion

that a single one of the Gringo soldiers had accompanied them on their wild flight. They were going to cross the line now easily and unmolested, and Pablo, the chief of the gun-runners of Cuyamaca, was in command. Jimmy heard the old rascal yelling now in English, of which he had a very decent knowledge when he wished.

"English?" murmured Private May. "Well, then some of our fellows are there, still alive, but prisoners!"

Then he saw them reel down from the cab. Four figures, and carrying a fifth who seemed badly hurt. Jimmy made out the uniform of the United States Army on three of the men who were lined up alongside the locomotive. He crawled silently closer under shelter of the mesquite and rocks, and then he could see Corporal Boyd quite plainly, wrists and elbows tied behind him. Eddie Perkins was in the same fix.

But the Mexicans were busily passing down bundles of plunder which they had retrieved from the wrecked car and thrown forward onto the engine, it appeared. Army kits and blankets and grub and ammunition—apparently they had saved a lot of loot after the explosion in the after

end of the car. Jimmy watched unceasingly. He resolved to let them burden themselves down with the unwieldy packs they were making, and then start a surprise party of his own, just when and how he would leave to events. It depended on what the outlaws intended to do with his comrades.

Old Pablo was bawling orders to his unruly crew. Man after man picked up his pack and fell into line. Then Pablo spoke to the prisoners. Jimmy wiped the sand from his ears and listened, but in vain.

But he saw Corporal Tim Boyd step forth reluctantly, and Perkins follow him, and then the two trainmen. The wounded soldier was left lying in the gravel beside the locomotive. The last Mexican in the line, who carried the extra captured rifle, yelled at Pablo, then pointed back at the helpless fellow. For an instant Jimmy's heart pounded against his ribs; he thought they were going to shoot the wounded man, and like a flash Jimmy's rifle came up, beaded on the Mexican with the gun. If the other lifted his weapon Jimmy would bore him through. But Old Pablo shouted back angrily. The other

Mexican shrugged, lifted his pack and took up the end of the line. And on they trudged through the dust storm straight down on Private May, who skulked lower behind the rocks. Six Mexicans there were now, and as Jimmy knew that eight had been in the car, he reasoned that Boyd's guard had settled for two of them. And one of the guard detail was missing—that accounted for the fighting figures that were hurled from the car door miles back up the track.

But Jimmy was not bothering about the start of the affair now; he was planning the finish. Warily he crawled away from the line of march in order to get them where the glare of the fire would not be upon himself. He gained a larger clump of bushes and bending low in the dark, he discovered that around it was a well-marked trail leading to lower ground.

"Old Pablo knows where he's going, all right," murmured Jimmy. "Well, so do I now—plenty —plenty!"

His course had been much shorter than that of the outlaws and their prisoners. When he heard a faint crunch of feet in the gravel around the bushes he crouched lower, cleared his eyes.

Then he made out a form bowed and trudging on, dragging a rifle muzzle down under one arm. Old Pablo, without doubt. Boyd, the first of the prisoners, was about abreast of the renegade. The other shadowy figures straggled along behind, neither captors nor captured having a suspicion of interference. Even when Private May stepped out alongside of his non-com, the Mexicans, their heads bowed against the dust swirls, did not notice him. Jimmy even confidentially nudged Corporal Boyd in the ribs as he passed him. And then he measured his distance, whirled his rifle and brought the butt down with one terrific smash across Pablo's neck. He heard Boyd stop with an amazed grunt. But Rookie May did not wait; one leap and he had dragged the rifle from under Pablo's nerveless arms. Then he dashed back past the line of men. The Mexicans with their packs had not an idea what had stopped the march in the dark ahead. Jimmy passed them all to the last man, who carried the extra rifle. And into his face Private May jammed the ugly little muzzle of his own gun and yelled one of the few Spanish words he knew: *"Alta!"* Then—in good U. S. A.: "Drop that

gun, you yellow coyote! *Pronto!* Hands up, all of you!"

There was a muffled yell from the Americans —a surprised grunt or two from the outlaws. But not a man moved. They simply stared, every one of them supposing that a whole detail of the border patrol had rounded them up. So did the Americans, for that matter. Perkins came joyfully staggering into Jimmy May.

"Glory be! And what's your regiment, old boy?"

Jimmy wanted to laugh, but he was too busy, and besides his lips would bleed, if he as much as smiled. He merely circled around Perkins, swept the Mexicans with his gun, and yelled all the Mexican he knew at them.

"I guess this is a lone play!" gasped Perkins. "But who's your officers?"

"Corporal Boyd!" yelled Jimmy. "Corporal Boyd of the gu-aa-rd!"

Even then they didn't catch the nervous exultant relief in Private May's husky voice. "O-oh, Corporal Boyd!" bawled Jimmy again.

"Knows us, by Swanny!" whooped Perkins. "*Who* is it, anyhow?"

Boyd came back uncertainly through the dark.

"I say that was quick work! What outpost is this pal—and who's your officer commanding?"

Jimmy looked close and searchingly into his non-com's face. But Boyd's own anxious, dust-lined face was still blank. No wonder—Jimmy's own mother would have refused to recognize him—smoke, blisters, sand, dust, blood and grime. Then suddenly Private Perkins yelled incredulously:

"This ain't no border patrol! This is B Company—and I know—I *know* that darn canteen! This is Rookie May—Doll-Face Jimmy!"

Corporal Boyd eyed Perkins compassionately. "You're off your head, Perkins! May was blown clear off that blind into Kingdom Come. This—stranger, can you cut me loose? They were sure snaking us over the line, all right, when your bunch happened in."

"Happened in!" protested Perkins. "This guy is Rookie May—and he's come all the way along with us somehow!"

Jimmy was sharply giving some command to the huddled prisoners when something in his voice caused Corporal Boyd to start.

"Jimmy! *Jimmee!* Why, you worthless bucky, where you been? You never come along!"

"Yes, sir! Hung on by an eyelash, sir! And I cut the train loose when it started to blaze. Anybody hurt, sir?"

"Cut me loose! *Jim-mee!* You did this—*all alone?*"

"Had to," murmured Jimmy. "Yes, sir, I had to!"

Corporal Boyd raised his free arms and shook them slowly in the wind. Jimmy was slitting the rope from Perkins' back, and then the two trainmen. Old Pablo was writhing into consciousness in the dust.

"When that old murderer survives—and I hope he don't—I'm going to introduce you to him, Jimmy! Second time you've crabbed his game! And let's hike this bunch on till we meet a border patrol. Oh, 'tis a story, Jimmy, that I'm ashamed of!"

"But what——" pleaded Jimmy, "and who went off the car up the road?"

"Frazier, and he carried two Mexicans with him. Maybe he'll be picked up alive, and maybe not. And that's Crane we left by the engine—

a piece of the bomb hit him, but he'll get over it."

"Bomb!" whispered Jimmy hoarsely. "Excuse me, but the details——"

"Rotten," grumbled Boyd. "That patrol that handed us the last three prisoners never searched 'em sure. One of the greasers had a little bomb made out of a gaspipe, it looked. Anyhow, they all pretended to be asleep up in their end of the car, and Crane and Frazier and me were leaning back against the dunnage, easy-like and comfortable, when one of these fellows ups and slams that bomb at us. I grabs for it like a cat after a chicken liver, but it went way over the company stuff down into the ammunition boxes. Must have been some dynamite there too! The dunnage was what saved us, but you got it full tilt, Jimmy, right against the car end."

"Yes," protested Jimmy, "but then what?"

"More fool work. The three of us, with Crane helpless, were choking around in that smoke when the eight of 'em rushed us. Frazier slammed two out the car door and went with 'em. The rest clubbed me down. Then along comes Perky innocent-like over the top of the tender to see

what's up and they laid for him. Of course Perky slips over a hunk of coal and falls slap into their arms. Then they take his gun and hold up the train crew. Can you beat it for this little old U. S. A., especially Perkins?"

Private May looked at the injured expression on Corporal Boyd's face, and then he looked at the woe-begone countenance of Private Perkins.

"Oh, Perkins couldn't help it, perhaps!"

"The mess," murmured Perkins, eying the huddle of prisoners under the muzzle of Private May's rifle, "will have a new name for the kid now. It'll be 'Jimmy-on-the-Job.' "

"Well, it was a good job," retorted Boyd, "and I wonder what B Company supposes is up, sitting in its coaches back there in the desert? Hope it enjoyed the fireworks!"

As a matter of fact the remainder of the troop train was uninjured, merely stalled back in the sandstorm some miles distant. It was some hours late in reaching the base camp at which it was to rejoin the battalion and prepare for the entry into Mexico as part of Pershing's expeditionary force and it had a rare yarn to relate. Jimmy May was glad when the order came that sent the

doughboys out on the long, dusty trail as a flanking force to the main body. He was over the border at last on a hard hike into enemy's territory, after the wiliest bandit that the southwest ever saw.

CHAPTER IV

PRIVATE PERKINS AND THE IMPOSSIBLE

WHEN the grizzled first sergeant of B Company came to the name of Private Perkins at roll call he hesitated just a moment, and then, mumbling it with a sort of catch in his voice, he said again:

"Perkins!"

It was just from force of habit, as no one had answered, just as had happened when he called Private Stillman's name. Every silent man in the long lines drawn up before the "pup tents" in the company street, knew doggedly why Sergeant Milbank had hesitated over Perkins.

Over Private Stillman's absence there was no doubt; he had been sent back in a pine box to the main base, having been shot dead on post three nights before, when Company B had first been sent out deploying as a flanking guard to the main expeditionary force over the border.

And the second night after this, Private Eddie

Perkins, fat, cheerful, negligent "Perky," had disappeared. There had been no quick brush with snipers as had happened with Stillman, calling out the relief guard and then the whole company in a vain endeavor to beat out the bandits who had assassinated the sentry. Perkins had just vanished from his beat, mysteriously; and the most diligent search that night and all the following day had revealed no sign of him nor the cause of his loss. Lieutenant Miller had made a reluctant report to regimental headquarters. The flanking party had taken every precaution, following the word of its guides in this wild and unknown country it was working out, while the advance column had spread far out looking for Villa's men. Company B's business was to guard the flank of the transport as the column got farther and farther from its base. But it had lost two men in its pursuit of this routine duty, and that did not read well up at headquarters.

When the assembly was over Private Jimmy May went back and, squatted gloomily on the flinty rock before his quarters. Perkins had been in his barracks' mess, and rear rank man to him

in company front, so somehow, Perky just seemed part of Jimmy's kit as a soldier.

He was cleaning out the dust from his Springfield's mechanism, and listening to the whir of the motors on the big trucks down at the end of the line, when Corporal Boyd passed by, bringing in the detail from the last relief. The company was to be under way in an hour, climbing steadily into the foothills of the Sierra Madre, escorting some transport trucks to a cavalry base which was supposed to have made this particular region secure by thorough scouting of every ridge and canyon.

"Corporal, what d'you suppose happened to Perky?" demanded Jimmy, suddenly. "It's kind of tough for the bunch to go on and quit the search."

"This stuff's got to go on," said Boyd. "Just got to go on for the fellows ahead. And ain't we beat out every foot of land in miles for Perkins? They just sniped and buried him, that's all. The orders are to get those trucks into Arroyo Seco by midnight, and we're going."

Jimmy was silent. It was all in the game, and yet—well, Perky was the worst soldier in B Com-

pany, perhaps. Slothful and dilatory, always being jerked up for something by the first sergeant, or in trouble with the officers. Yet he was a cheery, chubby, little man, and Private May, who had earned a name for being the keenest, cleanest, most punctilious rookie that ever the old doughboys had had to set in his proper place, missed him sorely of nights, even missed his "kidding" and his snores.

One after another the big motor trucks chugged into line, stopped while the camp luggage, already struck, strapped and ready, was piled in. Then it followed off on a dusty, treeless road, winding behind a rocky *mesa,* which soon hid the first car. The fellows were swaying and lurching on top of the trucks, legs hanging down, and in ten minutes silent and morose from the dust and heat. It would be a slow, all-day crawl, with nothing at the end save a desert camp somewhere where the scouts found water; and B Company would probably occupy some forlorn Mexican hamlet for a week while the advance column pushed into Chihuahua.

The cavalry had done its work well, despite the misfortune that had overtaken Company B.

Roads and villages seemed all but deserted as the transport guard came to them. At a well under some dusty pepper trees in the blazing noon, Lieutenant Miller met a courier sent back to order a change in the distribution of the supplies. He was to detach four of the twelve trucks and send them into another valley to the hungry cavalry, who had made a new disposition for some reason.

Jimmy heard the Mexican guide explaining the difficulty of the roads, and the American officers trying to puzzle out the route. And finally there were some decisive orders, and all but sixteen men of the company jogged out with the truck train on the Arroyo Seco road. An hour later ten of these took six of the trucks out on another pass, and Boyd, when he came back from a summons to his superior officer, made a brief comment to the idling soldiers under the trees.

"They're going to try to push one of these loads down to the bottom of that creek bed, where it's to be met by a detachment from across the mountain. The rest are to stay here, but it's my luck to get the rough stuff. Bet there ain't

a trail down there in spite of what the guides say. And you're going, May—you and Tolliver, and the truck driver, and myself. I'll gamble we don't sleep till tomorrow night."

So, until four o'clock the detail drowsed in the shade. The mess call came early, and then the big long truck, a tarpaulin lashed down close over its load, banged out to where Corporal Boyd and his two men climbed wearily to the top. Milbank sent them away with a brief instruction.

"This guide, Miguel, has orders from Lieutenant Miller to take you down in that canyon as far as a branch leads up in those west foothills. There you are to report to the commanding officer of the cavalry detachment, who'll meet you and take the truck on. You three men are to come back, and you ought to make it by daylight, from what Miguel says."

Then the army truck swayed on and down the roughest road the transport had struck since it followed Pershing's men over the border. When it got to the canyon bed the going was better, but the three silent soldiers behind the guide and truck driver enjoyed it no more. Half a dozen

times the powerful motor struggled in the deep sand as it crossed the creek bed, and then twisted around great boulders, where the shadows of the canyon walls made the bottom a hot, lifeless gloom. It took an hour to make six miles; and then Miguel, the New Mexican half-breed, found his cross canyon running down from the table-land. But no cavalry was there. They had been told that the detachment was waiting impatiently for the supply trucks. Miguel explained that perhaps they had waited up on the *mesa*. He told Corporal Boyd that he would scout on, and that, from a point clearly seen against the western sky up the slope, he would signal in half an hour if the truck was to come on.

The Americans waited idly, frying their bacon over a fire built of dry mesquite; and sure enough, when Boyd had timed the guide with his watch, they saw the half-breed waving his blanket from the jutting spur of the cross canyon. Thompson, the civilian truck driver, at once began to lament his luck.

"Ain't it bad enough here without those fool cavalry wanting me to lug this car clean over that mountain? What they think we are any-

how—a pack of horseflies that kin skin up the leg of a table and hang to the underside?"

But the chief joy of an army transport driver is to kick at everything proposed to him, so when Boyd gave his brief orders the outfit went painfully on. A mile up the rocky road they discovered an adobe hut at a fork to this canyon; a visible and much better road led on westward, and a rough trail turned south. So evidently was the first road the one most used, that Thompson drove his truck past the empty hut without a glance at the steeper left-hand way. In half an hour more the big car was rumbling on easily on top of a vast, treeless plateau of lava rock, with the distant mountains sharp against the setting sun. Boyd stood up on the luggage scanning the desolate prospect.

"I suppose that fellow knows where he's to cut away from the canyon and meet us," he said, "but he ain't in sight."

"I was thinkin'," grumbled Thompson, "we've come out a heap closer to them mountains than I care to linger personally. It's a right lonesome road."

A mile on across the level *mesa* the road began

to slope gently down to another shadowy canyon. And there Boyd called a halt. They sat in the utter desert silence waiting and listening.

"What do you make of it, Jimmy?" muttered his superior. "Miguel playing off on us, or got hurt? And where's the cavalry, anyhow?"

"Wrong road, I should say," answered Jimmy.

"If it is we ought to court-martial that guide and shoot him!"

"And sendin' me out here on a wild goose chase with a corporal's guard!" growled Thompson. "Speakin' of court-martials, why not——"

Boyd interrupted sharply. No one could question his officer's judgment in his presence. "That's enough, Thompson! Turn around; we can get as far as the first canyon, and then we'll await instructions. That was orders anyhow."

"We'll wait, all right," retorted the driver. "Couldn't get a motorcycle down that creek after dark!"

They were halfway across the flat *mesa* top when suddenly the swarthy, dust-lined face of Miguel Pacheco arose from the rocky roadside and with a swift, excited gesture motioned them

to stop. Boyd had already started to reprimand the guide angrily, when Jimmy muttered:

"Something doin', Corporal! There's another man!"

"Cover 'em," yelled Boyd. "Halt, you——"

But the next glance showed that Miguel himself had a prisoner, an undersized, ragged little Mexican sheep-herder who now was terrorized to find himself seized by three determined American soldiers.

"Teniente!" gasped Miguel, "I have something to say! This—a cousin of my wife's, he is, from Santa Maria—I discover in the *barranca.* He, too, is hiding—he has important things, *Teniente,* to relate!"

"Out with them, then," said Boyd. "Where's the cavalry patrol?"

"There are none, *Teniente!* They struck a hot trail, Francisco says, and were ordered back at the last minute. Francisco talked with them!"

"The mischief he says! But, Miguel, stop calling me a lieutenant!"

"It is quite so. And more, *Senores.* Within two miles of here is a nest of Villa's men—hidden and all overlooked!"

The faces of Corporal Boyd and Privates May and Tolliver, in the early gloom of that twilight, were blankly dismayed. As for Thompson, he exercised his civilian privilege of beginning to swear roundly at the Army and all its works.

"Two miles! And me here running a blamed sixty h. p. motor that you can hear from El Paso to Vera Cruz! Fine business, yes, sir—this is!"

Corporal Boyd sat himself down and scraped out his pipe. He wanted to think in military terms of what a commander should do if he had invaded a hostile country with two soldiers and a truck driver and was at nightfall fifteen miles from his base with two canyons and a mountain ridge between. Miguel and his wife's cousin from Santa Maria poured forth an excited jabber of warnings and dire predictions.

"Say!" roared Boyd, "cut this, will you? Now answer me—first, do you think these bandits know we are here? And how many of them?"

"Francisco say maybe, sixty those thieves, *Senor Teniente!*"

"Sixty! And they—trailing us, Miguel?"

"They *droonk!*" gestured Miguel. "Ver' happy, say my wife's cousin."

"Good! Let 'em celebrate! Would myself, if Company B could join 'em!"

"That doesn't say how we're goin' to lug this truck out o' here," grumbled Thompson. "Can't be done, that's all, till tomorrow."

Boyd regarded the truck worriedly. Miguel was listening to his wife's cousin, who was explosively relating some other mystery. Miguel's dark face grew more expressive. Finally he turned to Boyd eagerly.

"He say, *Senor,* of the fat, short soldier what is gone—he know!"

"Hey?" queried Boyd abruptly.

"Perky!" gasped Jimmy May. "That's who they mean!"

"Si! Si!" whispered Miguel. "He is in danger, *Senores!* Tonight, perhaps, to be executed!"

The Americans stared. "Not if we know it," muttered Private May. "Where is he, Miguel?"

In his broken English, Miguel went on with what he learned from the stolid Francisco. Private Perkins was confined in the *patio* of an adobe house on the abandoned sheep ranch where Villa's marauding party held out on their abandonment of an attempt to reach the border.

They were the ones who had sniped Company B's sentry, and had captured Perkins by a rush in the dark and carried him off, hoping to learn of the Americans' movements from the prisoner. Francisco had seen him, had even been forced to wait on him at the *rancheria,* before he ran away, and he was sure that the bandits would kill Perkins this very night, for they had despaired, by threats or torture, of getting anything out of the gringo, and they were going to escape southward at once.

"Don Felipe order they no take him," went on Miguel, "so this night certainly they kill him!"

Boyd went on with his hasty examination. Francisco thought the bandits were still unaware of the Americans' presence. The wind had been strong across the *mesa* all day and Felipe's men lay two miles to the southward. In fact, if Mr. Thompson had kept on his way he would have driven squarely into the *rancheria.*

Corporal Boyd summoned Jimmy and the lanky, silent Tolliver aside.

"What I'm going to do, fellows, is this: Send Miguel back at once to camp. I only hope Lieutenant Miller is back with enough men to hurry

over here and rescue Perky. Anyhow, we can only put it up to Milbank, who is in charge of the men that were left. And we'll wait here, or scout around that ranch. There's only one hope, and that is that the bandits stick around in their carouse till daybreak, and leave Perky alive till they saddle up. By then Miguel will guide all the Company B men that have returned to the camp over here and we'll rush 'em."

"Slim chance for Perky at that," muttered Jimmy, gloomily.

"I know. But what's to be done. Three of us against sixty!"

Jimmy stared after the shifty figure of Miguel disappearing into the dusk. It would take hours for any reinforcements to reach them over the canyon roads, and, worse, there was little likelihood of the scattered detachments of B Company assembling in time at the camp by the well. Milbank might not know just where to communicate with his superiors until the next morning.

"Poor old Perky!" muttered Jimmy. "And this greaser says he refused to say a word of how many there were of us or where we were bound! They tied him up to a post in the *patio* and

strung a rope around his neck, and then got drunk on the liquor they looted from the ranch store. Poor old Perky!"

Thompson, the laconic New Mexican stage driver, turned army truckman, settled himself in his blanket against the chill of the desert night.

"Lucky if they only hang him!—after their hides are full of *aguardiente.* They're mostly Yaquis in that bunch, and the breeds are worse."

Private May munched away on his hard bread and canned beef. Francisco, the scared little sheep herder, crept near, muffled in his serape against the cold wind off the mountains. He had been beaten with the bandits' pistols, threatened with death, and robbed; and he was very grateful for half of Jimmy's mess allowance. Again, in his difficult English he rehearsed the scene at the *rancheria,* the dogged American soldier roped to a post with the raiders jeering at him. Finally Jimmy reached a hand to the sheep herder's arm.

"Francisco, could you sneak me up close where I could see them?"

"Si!—si, Senor! The corral——"

Jimmy looked pleadingly at his "non-com." Boyd shook his head.

"A fellow might discover a way. Besides, tomorrow, if we attack, we ought to know the lay of the land. And Perky, I'd like to know——"

Corporal Boyd suddenly rolled over and sat up. "Say, Jimmy, you fool! What did you propose this for? Now, I'm going! And if we get lined up at a stone wall at daybreak, just as B comes clattering down on 'em, and the firing squad gets us *first,* why just remember it was you did it! But come along, then!"

It was like Boyd suddenly to be touched by some faith to a comrade, forlorn and useless as the quest seemed. But quickly he instructed Tolliver and Thompson to take watch on and watch off until he and Jimmy returned. And if they heard shots, why there was nothing to do but make a way as best they could off the *mesa* back to the company base.

Then Jimmy followed his superior at Francisco's heels down a sloping road until they came to a high adobe fence. Stealthily they rounded the corner of this, crossed a dirty corral, gained the tiled roof of a low shed and then lying flat, eyes just peering over the ridge, they could look down in the open *patio* of the looted ranch. And

the first thing Jimmy saw was his old rear rank man, Perky, sitting at the foot of a tall post, tied hand and foot, his head bowed, heedless of the racket going on a few yards away. Around a long table set almost directly within the great open place leading from the courtyard, were a score of wide-hatted, short-jacketed fellows, the dead shots and hard riders of Villa's famous *Dorados,* the "Golden Ones," of his own troop, while back, crouched against the walls, sleeping or idling, were as many more blanketed Yaquis. They had been drinking hard and feasting on the looted ranch commissary, and their famous *La Cucuracha* was being roared out by a chosen number of voices:

"Pa poner la en el sombrero
Del valiente Pancho Villa!"

And, shouting again their intention to hang their enemies to Pancho Villa's sombrero, the marauders banged the table with their cartridge bandoleras.

Jimmy saw the prisoner raise his head and look steadily at his tormentors. Not a trace of fear

was in Perky's cool eyes. And it was too much for Private May. He slid back and dropped stealthily off the roof to the ground. The form of Corporal Boyd came after him, and in the dark the two soldiers whispered:

"Perky—old boy! Did you notice, Jimmy, the way he bluffed 'em?"

"I noticed," retorted Jimmy, "one thing. Those fellows haven't a sentry anywhere! Not a guard on the roads as we came up. Every man jack of 'em is in for the celebration. They think, when the cavalry went back, that the hunt ended in this valley. I'll bet they tricked the troopers off on some false scent, and here they are within fifteen miles of our base. Why they could rush our fellows in a surprise attack and get clean away if they only knew we were just over the first ridge!"

"If we only had a platoon of B Company we'd clean up that whole outfit in one rush. And save Perkins, too. Take 'em quick, and they'd not have time to finish the lad. But it's no use. We can't get a man here till daylight."

Corporal Boyd squatted in the dust gloomily. Francisco groped to them with a warning. Some

drunken vaquero might stumble on them any moment. Silently they crawled along to the angle of the wall, gained the road and set back heavy-hearted through the starlight. That road, all the way down from the *mesa,* was a clean-swept, rocky surface as good as any motorist could wish for if he went after a record.

And Private Jimmy May suddenly stopped when he was halfway to the army truck. He reached to grasp Corporal Boyd's shoulder. Danger and hardships had at last won him a place in Tim Boyd's trust, he felt, and so it was as man to man that he eagerly whispered his great scheme.

"Tim, if it was *you* tied up there waiting death, and it was Perky and *me* out here, safe and with a plumb whole truck load of grub and cartridges, do you know what we'd do? We'd sail into that outfit, orders or no orders, and bring you out. And Captain Manion and the lieutenant—down in their hearts they want us to take the long chance!"

"Long chance! Twenty to one!—I guess it *is!* Thompson doesn't count."

"Say, Corporal, suppose a fellow piled all that

grub and stuff neck-high around the car; barricaded Thompson in to his eyes, and the three of us hooked right down into that courtyard on the high speed, three rifles to a man, yelling and shooting? I don't care if there were a million of 'em, they wouldn't *stand!* We'd have the inside of that court and Perkins to ourselves in five minutes!"

"Kid!" gasped Boyd, "the nerve of you again!" Then he stared long at Rookie May in the starlight. "Well, if this thing goes wrong I might as well quit the army, 'stead of studying for a commission."

"If this thing goes wrong, Corporal," retorted Jimmy, "you and I will quit the army via a pine box, like Stillman did!"

But Jimmy knew from the quick decision of Boyd's orders that he was grimly going after Perkins dead or alive. When they broached it to Thompson, the veteran driver flatly rebelled. It was crazy, useless, and would draw a court-martial for them, even if they escaped.

Boyd listened quietly; then he answered: "All right, Thompson! You can hike back to the base camp. I can drive that truck myself—full speed

clean into that *patio* before those fellows know what hit 'em!"

"No, you don't!" growled the driver. "I'm goin' to myself! Pork-an'-beans for armor plate, hey? Say, if they volley us, boys, this outfit will be a regular mulligan! This is a tank car, right-o!"

For Boyd and Jimmy and Tolliver were repacking the entire top load of the truck so that cases and bundles formed a barricade on every side. They strapped the heavy tarpaulin, wrapped around sacks of flour so that the driver could crouch behind it and steer his car. Thompson jammed his hat down over his eyes when he had swung into his nest. Then he glanced up at the barrel of Jimmy's Springfield just over his head. "You fellows hold on now, for the last half-mile on that down stretch this car is goin' to go some! And so long! Don't ever expect to see you again this side o' Kingdom Come!"

"That fellow," muttered Tim Boyd, bracing himself in the narrow pit in the center of the truck load, "is a regular pessimist, ain't he? Now you boys got those extra guns where you can grab

'em? And cartridges right to your fists? Empty 'em at every livin' thing that moves, and yell like Comanches! We got to make 'em think the whole U. S. Army is down on 'em, aeroplanes, armored cars, horse, foot, and heavy artillery! If they discover it's only three of us—farewell to the gladiators!"

Jimmy snuggled against the cartridge boxes as the car went purring off on the starlit slope. Smoothly, Thompson held her for the first mile, with little Francisco crouched at his feet whispering directions about the road. Then suddenly a lurch to the right, a snort of the motor as Thompson eased her out, and Jimmy saw the long, gray wall flash past.

"In for it now," gasped Tolliver, and he threw himself against the side of the flying fortress. "There's a light—is that the gang?"

"Right-o!" yelled Corporal Boyd, "too late for 'em now."

For he and Jimmy had feared that if any warning reached the bandits even three minutes in advance, they would close the great wooden doors to their improvised *cuartel* or barracks. If Thompson had to stop outside the adobe walls the

scheme was doomed to failure, and they were all lost as well.

But when the lanky ex-stage driver saw the yellow glow from the *patio* entrance and the Mexicans sitting around the long table roaring out their tavern songs, he opened the throttle with a long, wild yell. They were within a hundred yards of the adobe wall when a dark figure flitted from the shadows to stand sentinel fashion in the lighted doorway.

The invaders heard a faint cry: *"Alta!"*

Then a rifle cracked. And the noisy revellers within seemed suddenly arrested in their movements. A few started up, listened. Another sleeping guard appeared by the ranch-house wall and fired a wild shot.

Thompson had opened the muffler now. His hand went to the big, hoarse siren, and with an unearthly chorus of yells, explosive exhausts and the weird, broken *honk!—honk!* of the horn on the desert night, the big truck lunged squarely into the doorway. A dozen blanketed Indians were sleeping by the wall. Not one of the *Sonorenos* from the wild west coast had probably ever seen an automobile, least of all one spitting

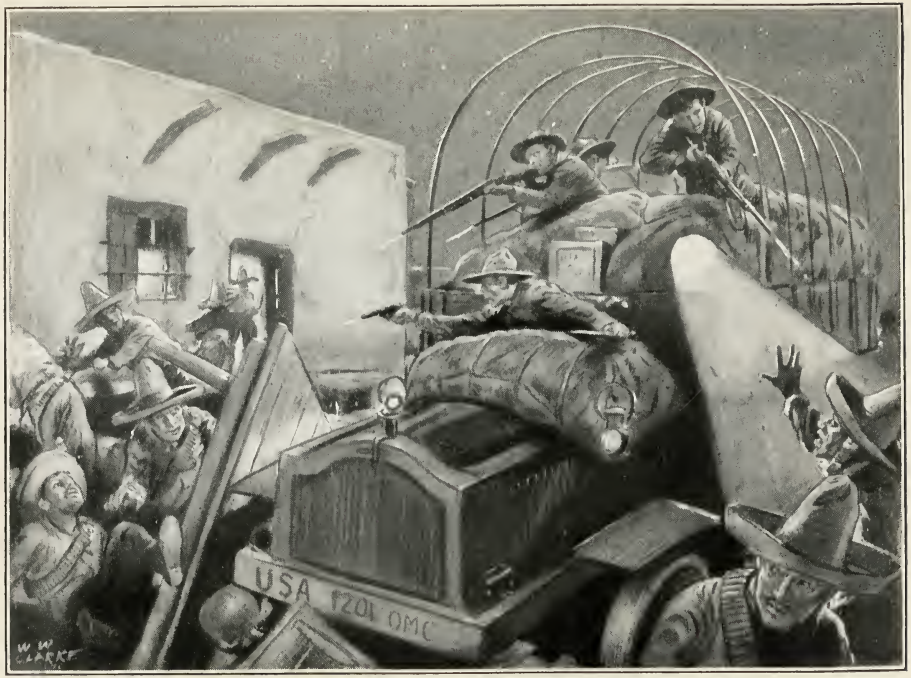
fire and death on them. The Villa raiders around the table were more sophisticated, but they were bewildered with drink, and not a man had his rifle where he could seize it.

There were some men actually still sitting around the long table, glasses in hands, staring at their more alert comrades who had arisen, howling commands and imprecations when Thompson sent the truck crashing into the feast. The long table was hurled to one side in splinters, over-setting a dozen of the revellers. And up over the sides of the pork-and-bean barricade, as Thompson termed the fighting deck of the truck behind him, arose three fighting American soldiers.

Crack! Crack! went the sharp spiteful reports of the Springfields, poked down almost in the faces of the struggling groups. Men were falling, leaping, scrambling, some for the doorway, some for the stacked arms, which were against the wall thirty paces away.

"Their guns, Jimmy!" roared Boyd. "Nail 'em as they reach the guns!"

Jimmy's rifle barked on the first man to touch the stacked Mausers, and he fell heavily over the



Crack! Crack! went the spiteful reports of the Springfields.

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entire lot. Tolliver dropped the next two bandits, and Boyd drove the next group entirely back from the weapons. Howling, turning their hands up against the fierce glare of the headlights of the chugging car, the Mexicans ran hither and thither seeking egress.

Thompson, grizzled and dirty, uprose from his wheel, a six-shooter in each hand, and a deadly shot with either. The low space under the archway was blue with smoke and choking with acrid fumes, and through this Jimmy fired at the last beaded jacket he saw as it disappeared. The *patio* was cleared save for a dozen dead or wounded men. One of them rolled over and sat up, staring; and Boyd saw the flimsy cheapness of a gay uniform. The bandit officer held up his hand.

"Americanos!" Then he turned to glance down the arcade. Neither left nor right did he have a man remaining. *"Companeros!"* he shouted. "Surrender! We are overpowered!"

He stared up at three campaign hats just showing above the dirty tarpaulin in the smoky archway. Thompson had leaped down and run

to the door, where he was banging away with his old 45-caliber six-shooters into the darkness. Francisco was firing one of the army rifles wildly down a side entrance of the *patio*.

"Keep it up!" shouted Boyd, "make noise enough for a regiment!"

Tolliver and Jimmy leaped out, one running to each side and climbing the winding stairs. From the upper windows they looked out on the deserted corral and outbuildings, and the road, down which there came a clatter of horses' feet. And volley after volley the two fired, while Thompson kept up his din. The big driver was out in the road himself now, dancing and shooting, and yelling in Spanish. If there was any doubt in the befuddled liquor heads of this party of Villa's marauders as to the strength of this attack, Thompson alone would have dispelled it. He whooped company and regimental orders in wild and aimless profusion, and his iron lungs would carry a mile. The bandits believed that the whole *ejercito gringo* had surrounded the ranch house.

When Jimmy and Tolliver with empty guns, had gone to the *patio* they found Tim Boyd rub-

bing the nerveless arms of Private Perkins where the leather thongs had bound him.

"Thanks!" gasped Perkins, dizzily, and he sat down again. That was all he could say, so bewildering had been the uproar in the courtyard, so hopeless had he been of rescue. Jimmy was patting his back while the others were closing the great doors. Francisco knew the *rancheria;* he dashed to all avenues, closing and barring the entrances. Then, Boyd ordered all up to the roof.

"Got to fight 'em off till daybreak," he said laconically, "and wait for Miguel and the relief."

But over the wide, starry valley not a thing stirred, save one distant shout and the clatter of a flying horse on a rocky stretch.

"Fight?" said Thompson, huskily. "Ain't a love tap left in one of 'em!"

Down in the *patio,* little Francisco guarded seven wounded bandits, including the officer. Nine of the outlaws would never ride with Pancho again; they lay still forever in the dust of the yard about the army truck.

When the Americans came down at daybreak, leaving Tolliver on guard, the bandit lieutenant sorely uprose and saluted Boyd.

"Senor, this is—impossible! Only four *Americanos!"*

"Perky, bless your freckled hide," said Corporal Boyd, "you sit down here, while Rookie May cooks up a little snack of something to eat, and explain to this feller just what is possible and what ain't possible. Sometimes our little old Army gets 'em mixed up and can't tell which is which. And Rookie's the worst in the lot—he started all this muss, for you, Perky—possible and impossible."

And all the way back to the rendezvous, as the soldiers sat guarding the seven prisoners on the army motor truck, Private Perkins rubbed his sore arms and legs where the bonds had cut him and regarded his silent bunky with respectful interest.

"As a rescue this was fine work all right," he murmured, "but from what you call a professional point of view it was bad tactics—very bad. You fellows oughtn't never to have tried it. If I have to make a report, Mister May, I'd have to show you up—still, if you hadn't done it, you and me, bunky, wouldn't be eatin' our chuck together tonight back with the fellows, would we?"

CHAPTER V

THE DEFENSE OF THE HAWK'S NEST

IT was a proud day for Rookie May when he first turned out his corporal's squad and noted that each of his old comrades glanced at the chevrons on his sleeves without envy or disparagement. Jimmy had won his promotion not only by a faithful adherence to every routine of duty, but also by a series of personal adventures, the outcome of which B Company concluded was just "bullheaded luck."

"Anyhow," said Private Perkins, "he gets away with it. And here's me, a three-year soldier, takin' orders from Jimmy, and proud of it. This boy's learned more regular army business in one year than I would in ten, and he carries it so well that if it was left to B we'd vote for him for lieutenant-general, we would! There's the real man of him now, gettin' away with this non-com stuff easy as he did in the ranks and leavin' no hard feelin's anywhere."

Yet, bringing in his squad from guard relief or putting them to menial police work about the base camp, Corporal Jimmy, youngest non-com in the regiment both in years and term of service, felt that the old doughboys might not take him quite seriously. Despite his record, promotion was a lucky fluke in the eyes of some. The officers liked his neatness, quickness of thought in emergencies, and all that, but so far, Company B's outpost work on the flank of the expeditionary force, had not been the steady grind on nerves and discipline that a campaign in actual war would bring. Being sniped by a bandit or two merely quickened interest, but of late B Company had lingered in its adobe barracks in a miserable Mexican hamlet and seen and done nothing.

So when a courier brought word to Lieutenant Miller, in command, that one of the army aviators, speeding back and forth from Pershing's advance front to the military base at Columbus, had disappeared, and that this outpost was nearest to the scene of his supposed mishap, B Company stirred with the knowledge that some quick, rough work was ahead.

Lieutenant Miller summoned all his non-com-

missioned officers to lay out briefly what was to be done.

"This machine, with Captain Milroy in it alone, disappeared the day before yesterday, and the last word was that some *mozo* saw it descending in the western ridge of those mountains beyond this camp. That's all we have to go on, but you'll have to scatter and look lively and keep on the job night and day. If Captain Milroy was injured in coming down he will need instant relief."

And then the officer gave curt instructions to each non-com, sending the company by squads to spread as far along the foothills as possible, looking for the lost aeroplane. Two hours later Corporal May had hiked his men far out of touch of Corporal Boyd's on his left. It was noon when they toiled up to the first desolate ridge where a view was to be had into the wilderness of peaks and canyons beyond.

"Fine chance that birdman has got," muttered Private Perkins, as the squad munched its ration and washed down the canned meat and hardbread with warm canteen water. "Might as well look for a needle in a haystack. There ain't even

a drink of alkali juice in them hills, and every *mozo* has skipped out—it's about an even break whether they're more scared of Villa's bandits or us *gringos,* but they ain't goin' to help any aviator that slapped down among 'em."

Corporal Jimmy May, hanging his leggined legs over a pitch of lava rock, looked off to the canyon. Miles to the westward a sheer pinnacle of rock glistened in the noonday sun, and at this Jimmy pointed.

"You fellows will head a general direction for that peak," he said. "We must scatter out and cover all the land we can, and it will be slow going at best. If we beat up the six or seven miles between here and that rock by nightfall, we'll do well. So, remember, all meet there if no clue is found before dark."

Perkins and Tolliver and Jones slid off down the slope, scattering half a mile apart on the man-hunt. Jimmy himself decided to follow the highest ridge westwardly. Climbing the boulders, peering down the *arroyos,* listening now and then for a shot that might betray the whereabouts of the lost aviator, he worked on. In half an hour he was as good as lost in the rocky wilderness. In

the canyons a few oaks and pinons scattered up the slopes, but here was a burnt-out and grassless world, with not even a coyote or an owl to relieve the monotony.

"I reckon he's dead," mused Jimmy; "if he had to land in this inferno. Two days and nights, and probably hurt, and no water or grub, very likely."

Two hours brought him over rough trails to the canyon, across which, rising from a rock-strewn slope, was the bare pinnacle that had been the landmark for the searchers. Along the rim of this went Corporal Jimmy looking sharply across the gulch.

The slope on his side gave way to sheer walls and he had to climb higher among cracks and boulders to the *mesa* top. Then he went on, still keeping the rock spire in sight, but knowing he had reached the spot hours before his comrades could make it. A few ancient, wind-torn oaks were along the canyon rim, and it was one of these, which fairly hung out over the gulch, that caught Jimmy's eye. A dull band of gray stretched across the tree top. Corporal May lost sight of the thing for some time; then

he came out above it, looked down across the canyon and whistled softly.

The lost aeroplane was there, hanging like a disabled bird out over the sheer canyon wall!

"He's done for!" muttered Jimmy. "Went out of his seat clean down five hundred feet or more!"

Slowly he began picking a way down the rounding slope of the *mesa* to the canyon rim. It was all clear, smooth rock, and Jimmy was picturing how the plane must have landed here and been unable to check itself ere it rushed for the abyss and providentially smashed into the tree whose base was rooted in a ledge below. That the gallant army airman was alive seemed impossible. Jimmy could see the motor hanging from the wreckage; the biplane, in fact, was a tangle of wire and frame and shattered stuff, save for one wing hung over the oak limbs.

But when Corporal May drew closer he stopped and stared. Something moved in a crotch of the tree. An arm was raised across the limb and a pistol was leveled. The next instant came the sharp bark of an army automatic, and

following it a rifle shot from somewhere down the slope.

"Cornered!" murmured Jimmy, "and they're after him!"

He ran swiftly down the rocky rim, then stopped and crouched low. His first glance over the wall showed skulking figures three hundred feet down on a narrow ledge of the wall. Far below these, on the canyon floor, a group of horses was huddled, one silent figure holding them and looking upward at the imprisoned birdman.

Jimmy whistled softly as he threw his rifle's muzzle downward towards the creeping outlaws. Then he saw the leather-coated figure in the tree turn slightly. The young officer muttered faintly.

"The army, sir! It's well some one has come. Your command is——"

"Company B, sir—outpost duty. Lieutenant Miller commanding. We just heard of your fix, sir, and were ordered out."

"Look sharp to your right, Corporal. There are five of them. They were riding down the valley and discovered me half an hour ago! They've been scouting a way up the cliff ever

since. I think I just crippled one of them, Corporal."

Corporal Jimmy listened to the grave, quiet voice. "Can't you get down, sir, and quick? We can stall 'em off in these rocks."

"I'm pinned down to this tree, Corporal—and hurt a bit. Forced landing on the *mesa,* and only this tree saved a bad smash."

"I should think so!" muttered Jimmy. "And——"

"Look out—a shot is coming, sir!"

Jimmy whirled swiftly, glancing down at the enemy. Not until then did he realize Captain Milroy's desperate plight. The airman was held about the legs by the tangled wires of his plane, and the motor's weight drew the wreckage taut about him. Beneath his bronzed cheeks Jimmy saw the pallor of suffering, but the hand that held the pistol did not tremble. But he was fast—a fair target for the raiders below, like a wounded hawk in the tree top!

Jimmy leaped forward to catch a better view of the bandits. One or two crouching backs among the boulders showed; and one fellow had stepped out to take a careful, deliberate aim at

the aviator. Too deliberate, by far, for, thinking joyously of the perfect scores he had made at the four hundred-yard targets, Jimmy covered the gray figure with his rifle. And the next minute, through the film of smoke, he saw the would-be murderer go headlong off the narrow ledge down into space. Then Jimmy went leaping forward to catch a sight of the crouching forms, and his rifle cracked again down over the canyon rim. He dug his toes into the rocks and stared into the gulf. Not a Mexican was visible now, so cleverly could they take cover among the rocks.

"Very good, sir!" The quiet voice of the airman spoke. "If you can keep them on that side, I think this tree crotch will give me a bit of cover."

Jimmy watched him in dogged admiration. "Got to pass it to him for nerve," he muttered to himself. "If only Perky and the boys could get here in time!" He thought dispiritedly that his scattered squad would be miles away laboriously trying to find trails over the rough ridges. They might hear the shots, but even then it would take hours to reach the rendezvous, to which Jimmy had found a better road.

Anyhow, he must stand by the helpless young aviator. Staring down the almost perpendicular descent he saw nothing save the boulder-strewn shelf along which the half-dozen bandits were lurking.

"Got 'em bottled a bit, sir," called Jimmy, reassuringly. "If anything moves down that trail I'll spot it!"

The crippled officer stifled a groan. And then, out of the sunny cliffside rang a shot. Jimmy saw the film of smoke. Then he heard the sputter of the bullet in the tree bark. Captain Milroy turned his calm face to Jimmy. "They're spotting me, Corporal. That shot struck within four inches of my head."

Jimmy whirled up from his cover and dashed along the cliff edge to drop behind another projection. "I'll break that fellow's game!" But nowhere could he see the hidden sniper. And another shot cracked below on the rock ledge.

Jimmy saw the wood splinters fly from the crotch of the oak. Crouching, he crawled farther along the cliff, then he cautiously swung his head and shoulders out, determined to find that sharp-

shooter. Another shot might kill young Captain Milroy as he lay.

But Jimmy saw nothing. "That dub is slowly getting the range. He's not much of a shot or he'd make a finish of it. There!——"

He caught a glimpse of a dusty figure creeping up a fissure in the wall below him. With a grim smile Jimmy swung his gun down, lying with head and shoulders over the cliff. He was just drawing a difficult bead on the sniper, when another rifle cracked farther back on the ledge below him.

And the next instant young Corporal Jimmy May of B Company nearly pitched over the canyon wall. The next he was scrambling back, humping like a worm and clawing at his eyes and mouth. His face was literally peppered full of stinging rock needles.

"Curtains!" he gasped, and then, getting his eyes opened a bit and seeing the blood follow his hand as he rubbed his cheek, Jimmy gave a mutter of despair. Far below on the rocky wall he heard a cling and a clatter, and then a triumphant yell. And crawling back from the danger zone he stood up and drew a long breath. "Got

my rifle, hey? Jimmy, you big fool—couldn't you take a rap like that without dropping your gun?"

Then he looked helplessly back along the canyon rim. He could see the aviator silently watching his mishap from the great oak tree. But a glance below showed five gray-brown figures shifting among the boulders on the canyon shelf. They were in the open now, unafraid of the Yankee sharpshooter, for well they knew he was disarmed. Corporal Jimmy wiped his half-blinded eyes again. Then he drew his bayonet from the sheath and ran back opposite the old oak tree. Just below this the ledge on which the Mexicans were scrambling straggled up to the canyon top, and if Jimmy could stop them at all it must be here. But it was hopeless—one American soldier armed with a bayonet against five bandits with rifles.

But Jimmy swung down until he reached the tree base. A black, gaping hole told him the old oak was hollow; and a few stubby limbs gave him climbing hold. Captain Milroy still had his army revolver, and Jimmy could make a last stand for their lives with it.

"Your automatic, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "Those fellows are coming up fast. Our chance is to hold them down the trail until my squad gets here. Perkins ought to hear this racket—he *must,* sir—down below!"

"They can pot me, now, from any point, Corporal. Can't move a leg, sir!"

"Here, sir!" Jimmy was reaching for the officer's pistol. "And give me a chance at a lift. This old trunk's hollow clean through, sir, and we might stand 'em off!"

The officer turned his head slowly. Jimmy was swinging upward from the great divide of the tree trunk below the higher crotch in which the aviator was imprisoned. The tangle of wires and frame had crushed his knees fast against the bark, but at this Jimmy went, heaving and cutting with his bayonet, twisting his legs about the limb below. Under them, swinging in mid-air, hung the compact motor, and Corporal May saw it was the weight of this that held the airman. Jimmy could look straight down into space below, and for a moment his senses reeled. The little black patches on the slope down there he knew to be trees five hundred feet away, and a slip, a

misapplication of his efforts, would plunge him to death. He got a hand under the twisted aeroplane frame, lifted and struggled. A stubby knot held the wreckage, and once clear of this Captain Milroy would be free. Jimmy entwined his own legs tighter below the crotch, heaved and fought until he could crawl up with his shoulder under the framework.

The aviator stifled a groan as the weight shifted on his bruised body. Inch by inch Jimmy got his stout young back under the wreckage and strained to straighten his shoulders.

"Careful! Careful!" gasped the officer. "We'll be jerked off together when it falls!"

"Five minutes more and those fellows will be up the trail, sir! They can't see us now for the bulge of the wall. Quick, now! When I heave up on this stuff, you slide down a bit!"

Jimmy had wormed under the tangle until his bleeding and perspiring face had come up almost alongside the aviator's leather hood. Then, together, Captain Milroy lending his last strength to raising the wreckage from his body, they heaved away.

"Slipping, sir!" gasped Jimmy. "Almost over that stub! And the motor's breaking loose, sir! Hold, now—to me—strong and steady! The stuff's going over!"

And with a grinding tear of the broken wing, a crashing of the higher limbs of the dead oak, Jimmy fought the weight from its frail balance. The aeroplane was completely broken in two above them, and presently, when Corporal May jammed the last bit of the engine frame through the crumbling sliver of wood that had held it, the dead weight of the engine suddenly plunged down a foot, held and quivered, and then the whole crumpled left wing of the aircraft tore off the obstructions and went downward. There was a snarl of wires around Jimmy's head and he ducked, throwing both arms about the officer's waist and the limb below.

The next moment, after the two men had lain in exhausted silence, they heard a splitting crash five hundred feet below on the canyon slope.

"Done for!" gasped Jimmy. "Now—can you move a leg, sir? Got to be quick about it!"

But Captain Milroy was all but helpless. His legs were numbed and crushed by their hours of

tortured binding against the tree trunk. He moved feebly, whispering his pain.

"I think everything's broken below my belt, Corporal. Feels that way!—be careful, or we'll follow that wreck!"

"Keep up your nerve, sir! We'll hump down in that hollow and give 'em a fight for it!"

The airman's eyes were closing, and he mumbled incoherently. Jimmy wormed down the trunk, holding to Captain Milroy's body.

"If he gives up, we're both goners," muttered Jimmy. "Over that canyon onto the rocks—and I did want to fight it out anyway!"

Ten feet below the crotch he saw the main limbs of the big oak part out so that a wide black hole showed the hollow. Whether it was large enough to conceal the two of them, or whether the interior offered any support, was uncertain. Jimmy knew he could not reach the ground at the cliff's edge in time to fight off the invaders, who must be fifty feet below trying to find a trail up the ledge. Alone, he would have taken a chance on standing them off there, but now it was impossible to leave the crippled aviator. When the full weight of the officer's body came onto

Jimmy's shoulders, the Corporal groaned despairingly. The burden tore his hold loose from the tree slowly, and once he was overbalanced they would both go headlong into the gulf.

"I could drop him," thought Jimmy desperately, "but it isn't fair! No, I *couldn't*—after taking all these chances for him!"

And he began to shake the insensible airman and plead with him to hold just a moment until Jimmy himself could grip something more than the dry bark on which his bleeding fingers were trying to hold. Captain Milroy's body had sunk down between Jimmy's own and the tree trunk, and the strain on Jimmy's thighs, his feet locked tight around the tree, was intolerable.

Then Corporal May set his teeth savagely into the airman's leather tunic. Hand by hand he got a lower hold; then he unlocked one leg and shifted it lower, then the other. The man's unconscious body slipped a bit, and Jimmy pressed it closer. Over Milroy's shoulder he had to stare straight down in the shadowy depths of the canyon.

"A bit better now," Jimmy thought; "the

angle ain't so steep to the big crotch. If he only could help a bit!"

The airman struggled and moaned.

"Hold—hold!" gasped Jimmy through his clenched teeth. "I got you, but hold the trunk!"

And that last six feet of the great slanting limb was something that Corporal May only remembers as a nightmare. The trunk was without a bit of bark or a projection—just a round, smooth surface, growing larger and more difficult to lock Jimmy's legs about. He had to pause and struggle until Milroy's body hung at some balance over the limb, pressing close upon Jimmy's chest; and then slowly the rescuer wormed down and down. He could not look below for foothold; with his face buried in the airman's jacket, teeth set through the leather, Corporal Jimmy snaked down and backward

"If they get to the top now they can drop two of us at a shot!" thought Jimmy, and he grew surly with the feeling that the bandits ought to give them a sporting chance for their lives at least.

His toes were just reaching for the gnarled edge of the hollow in the big main crotch, when

he heard an outcry below. Then a yell of astonished laughter. The bandits had come up the cliff and discovered him.

For a second Jimmy stopped his struggle to find a foot rest. He just lay along the big limb holding the aviator's body in balance across it, expecting to feel the smash of a bullet clean up from his heels to his brain. And then—well, it wouldn't make any difference then!

"Lost our last chance!" muttered Jimmy. "Well, it never was much!"

He could hear the raiders bawling to each other to hurry up the trail. One was laughing again, calling out jests in the tongue of the *Sonorenos*. The game was bagged, and there was no hurry. They had trapped one of the famous birdmen of the North, which the superstitious Indians joining the Villistas from the western mountains had now and then beheld with fear and awe as they skimmed over the *mesas* and valleys from the advanced forces of the gringo army to the bases on the Rio Grande. The raiders yelled and capered. Others below yelled back as they climbed the last of the dangerous trail.

After his first shrinking from the expected bullets, Jimmy went on securing his foothold. Captain Milroy was struggling to consciousness, and this made matters harder. But when Corporal Jimmy could at last set both feet on the edge of the hollow, and ease his burden down, he drew a long breath to steady his senses ere he looked off at the foemen.

There were two dark-skinned fellows standing not fifty feet away from the base of the overhanging oak tree. Both held rifles and had their *bandoleras* of cartridges well filled across their shoulders. They were looking up in the oak tree with great amused curiosity.

"Bravo, Americanos!" one yelled. He motioned Jimmy to come on down.

But Jimmy knew he could never get the wounded aviator the rest of the way down that tree trunk without a rope, even if he wanted to. And he had no idea of dropping into the clutches of Villa's men anyhow. Anything but that for the *gringo* peacemakers in Mexico. So, standing above the aviator's crumpled body in the fork of the main trunk, Jimmy shook his head. Yearningly he looked off across the bald, smooth slope

of the *mesa* on one side, and then across the blue depths of the canyon the other way. Far down there he saw the silent horseman holding the raiders' mounts and watching the affair up on the canyon rim. He seemed like a toy man down there, and Jimmy never felt so lonesome. He even would have been glad if the aviator had stirred or groaned. And again he shook his head at the Mexicans. The leader was calling boisterously for Jimmy to come down. Corporal May didn't know the words, but he knew the gestures. Inside his shirt he had Captain Milroy's automatic revolver, but he knew that the least sign of resistance would result in both of them being riddled. Two pigeons in a tree never offered a fairer mark than Corporal May and the army birdman.

"Nothing doing!" grumbled Jimmy. "It's just up to you fellows—that's all!"

He crouched down over Milroy's body. The dark gap of the tree hollow was under them. The unconscious man lay half in it, held up by the rough, inner convolutions of the wood. And Jimmy remembered his first plan to hide in the hollow. They could both have crouched within

easily. But now, if he made a move, the raiders would shoot, undoubtedly.

"Stall 'em a bit," thought Jimmy, "then—take a chance!"

So he began waving his arms and talking to the bandits. Yes, he'd come down—give him time and he'd slide. Not a word did the *Sonorenos* understand, but they yelled approval. They sat easily down on the rocks, as two more swarthy faces peered above the trail and climbed higher. The four laughed uproariously. It was the best joke on a *gringo* they had ever known.

And, little by little, pretending to seek a way down the outside of the tree on the stubby limbs, Jimmy pulled and poked Milroy within the protecting cleft. He noted that the wood was hard and thick. At the angle the fellows would have to shoot, it might stop a bullet. But Jimmy worked with careless ease, pushing his unconscious comrade lower in the hole. The aviator stirred and pleaded to be let alone, unknowing the little drama that his rescuer was enacting. Jimmy yelled more protests to the grinning Mexicans. He slid one foot over the tree surface outside, looked cautiously down, felt his way, and

then—quick as a cat, he jerked out his revolver and dropped inside. The hollow just barely sheltered his crouching back.

For a second there was silence. Then a surprised shout. And then crack—crack—went the rifles, and the wood splinters flew just above Jimmy's shoulder.

"All right!" he yelled. "Anyone who has nerve enough to climb this tree can come ahead!"

Another shot, and another. The fugitive felt the vicious plug of the bullets outside his hardwood fortress. "Straight through they might bore me," he thought, "but there's about twenty inches of dry oak or more in your line of fire! It'll take fire or an axe to force us out, and you haven't got either!"

Then he felt a pounding and scuffling at the foot of the tree. The raiders had climbed to the edge of the precipice. Suddenly in the hollow below there came the crack of a pistol. Again and again. The hole at the base would just allow a man to crook his arm in and fire up. But not a bullet got through; the curve of the trunk saved the trapped men above. Then there was an excited talk below. Jimmy got snatches of

it. One fellow was being urged to climb the tree. That worried Jimmy. A man forty feet away on the canyon rim might shoot him if he tried to defend his nest over the edge.

"But they're all right at the tree," reasoned Jimmy; "they haven't thought of that yet!"

So he waited until he was sure the climber was halfway up the thirty feet to the big fork, and then, swiftly rising, he flung his shoulder above the hollow, reached down outside and fired—a snap shot, but he heard a howl and a floundering.

"Winged him!" whispered Jimmy. "They won't try that again. Wonder he didn't pitch clean off into the gulch!"

Then the raiders fired wildly up in the hollow and also at the top where the fugitives were last seen. The acrid smoke came slowly up through the trunk, and the dull plug of the bullets in the wood aroused even the crippled aviator after awhile.

He dragged himself up a bit: "What is it?"

Jimmy eased his officer-comrade to a better position.

"Enjoying myself, sir! You wait—they can't

do all this firing without B Company hitting the trail this way—no, sir!"

The aviator, bewildered, stared at him, uncertain how he found himself in this dark, smoke-filled hole after twenty-four hours of suspension out in the tree top over the canyon. He started to talk confusedly, while Jimmy crouched over him, grasping the pistol and straining his ears against the slightest sound. There came a mutter of voices outside, then a single shot, and then a scrambling on the rocks. The Mexicans undoubtedly were climbing to the higher levels of the *mesa* top trying to see into the refuge. But that brought them back a hundred yards from the tree. Peering over cautiously, Jimmy saw three of them far back on the rocks. Then they began shooting, slowly, deliberately; and Jimmy crouched lower. Bullet after bullet smashed into the tough wood; it seemed as if the fugitives could almost feel the lead plunging through their cover, but only one did—glancing along the rim above Corporal May's elbow.

And after ten minutes the volleys ceased. Either the raiders gave it up or they were convinced they had riddled their prey. Jimmy heard

them busied again about the tree base. Then one shouted up through the crack. They fired one more pistol shot within. Still not a sound from the hunted ones.

"Wait till one of 'em climbs again," whispered Jimmy. "And then—what's that?"

Even the wounded airman started. "A *bugle,* sir! Cavalry, sir—coming!"

And Jimmy caught the far, stirring notes somewhere.

"As I live, sir—it is!" And Corporal May stuck his head out, first a glance at the hill to make safe against any sharpshooter out there, and then the other way down into the canyon. And he saw the prettiest sight his eyes ever rested on. There was a line of tiny horsemen flying along the valley floor; and nearer, the lone bandit with the raiders' mounts was vanishing in a cloud of dust. Outside, there came a howl of rage and then the clatter of rifles and belts down the rocky trail.

"They're going, sir!" yelled Jimmy, rising clear up now. "That fellow streaked off with their horses—and he'd better! No time to lose; it's the high hills for 'em—*pronto!*"

Excitedly Jimmy dragged the aviator up to where they could both lay over the fork of the oak and watch the pursuit. When the cavalry troop had strung out along the valley below, Jimmy began firing the pistol until he attracted attention. Then the two men lay silently out in the last sunshine and watched the dismounted soldiers climb to the *mesa* top, which took them all of a good hour.

The portion of the wrecked biplane at the foot of the cliff and the gray wing hung in the tree top told its own story to the cavalry captain before he reached the canyon rim. And the wondering horsemen looked just a bit chagrined when they managed to lower a stiff and tired infantry corporal down after the disabled airman.

The captain of the Aviation Corps looked at the captain of the Cavalry and saluted with something like a painful grin.

"I knew you'd be hunting me up, of course, but the doughboys beat you to it, this time. And actually, sir, this tree-climbing corporal seemed to enjoy it!"

Corporal May of the Infantry couldn't think of any comment that was needed from him. So

he saluted silently, but with a grin. What he envied just this moment were the troopers' horses, when he thought of the weary hike he and his doughboy detail would have to make back to the company base. His tough, lean, wiry body ached in every muscle, but his disciplined nerve would take him through.

CHAPTER VI

AMIGO

IT was the second day after B Company had been called back to a point nearer the line of communications as the little American army shortened its front after the fruitless chase of Pancho Villa came to an end, that the First Sergeant told Corporal Jimmy May that he was desired at the commanding officer's tent. The infantrymen were still stiff from their hike in heavy marching order back to the temporary battalion base, and, lying about under their shelter tents keeping from the keen autumn winds of the Chihuahua plateau, they speculated what "watchful waiting" might bring to the service, and especially what it might mean to Company B.

Company B still grumbled a bit because it had never reached the advanced line—"furtherest south"—although their flanking duty had been equally important. The next order might send

them back to the border along with the National Guardsmen, and B Company—first Battalion of one of the oldest and most famous regiments of the United States infantry service, with the markers of its dead scattered from Luzon to Santiago, and a history reaching back to the War of 1812, and every campaign between—was peeved that it had not reached the first line in this bandit hunt. It really felt that the nation owed it all the "rough stuff" there was to do, as Private Perkins remarked. And here it was drawing in its horns, probably on its way back to the border to guard ranchers' hen-coops. So it was not surprising that occasional grumbling came from the men in the pup tents.

Fat Private Perkins lay under his pup tent with one unlaced leggin sticking from under the flap, bawling out a bit of the regimental ditty which voiced its feelings:

"No State'll call 'im 'Noble Son,'
He ain't no ladies' pet——
But let a row start anywhere,
They send for him—you bet!

"He takes his little gun an' kit
An' starts off in the van——
The millin', drillin', made for killin',
Regular Army Man!"

Corporal May bent to stick his head in over Private Perkins' shins:

"Sick?" he inquired solicitously. "Then why didn't you come to sick call, Perky?"

"Sick? Why, I'm singin', Jimmy! Corporal Jimmy, that is, beggin' pardon. Here's one, original, that if we ever get to barracks ag'in, I'm goin' to teach the Regimental band:

"His feet is full of blisters,
But his heart is full of joy!
Ain't it nice to be Uncle Sammy's
Little soldier boy?"

"Perkins," said Corporal May solemnly, "this poem of yours gets you ten days—kitchen detail and camp police. Another verse gets you court-martial; two verses, a firing squad! Now get out of here. Rube Tolliver complains that you're getting so fat that it pulls up the tent pegs

when he tries to crawl in alongside you; he says when he gets into his blankets, and you both happen to draw a long breath together, something busts, and he's afraid he'll be charged with wanton destruction of government property!"

"Well, if this Land o' the Free and Home o' the Brave don't want me to get fat, it's got to go to war, that's all. Hikin' don't do me no good, either, for the more I hike, the hungrier I get, and the hungrier I get the more I eat, and the more I eat, the more Tolliver kicks about housekeepin' with me in this pup tent. Corporal, you better assign me a bunky that fits my curves."

"There isn't any," retorted Jimmy. "The Army wouldn't stand for him!" Then Corporal May dropped his banter for curt military directions: "Perkins, can you drive a motorcycle?"

"No, sir," said Private Perkins, sitting up and reaching for his untidy leggin. "But if it's to go special duty with you, Corporal, I'll learn right now!"

"No, I'll take it alone then. Lieutenant Miller gave me the privilege if I thought best. I thought maybe forty miles back along the *Ar-*

royo Seco road would bump some of the fat off you, but I can't take a rank amateur."

"Let me try it, Corporal!" Perky was scrambling around under his shelter. "Blistered and busted, I'd rather skin off with you than to be a gigadier brindle—I mean a brigadier general! Just for old days, when you were a rookie, and I taught you bits of the manual!"

Corporal May raised his hand quietly. "Not for nothing. Friendship doesn't go when it's special work. You know that, Perkins!"

Private Perkins looked sorrowfully out after Jimmy's alert, trim, quick-stepping figure. "Sure I know it—with Rookie May," he grumbled to himself. "That lad saved my life twice, and the mess loves him like no kid corporal was ever loved, but friendship stops when Jimmy thinks in orders. Orders! If Rookie ordered me to jump through a hoop, I'd jump—but I'd have to get a special-sized hoop. Yes, sir, I'd —there he goes now, buzzin' off on that road louse from company headquarters, inside of sixty seconds from the time they handed him his dispatches! Atta boy, Jimmy!"

Before Private Perkins had straightened up

outside the pup tent in the drifting morning fog, Corporal May had vanished over the first rise of a hill on the rock road. Special dispatches they were, and of what and to whom Jimmy did not know, save that he was to deliver them by noon into the Colonel's hands for wireless to the border.

Hanging to the bars, noting the controls and the working of the little motor, Jimmy also found time to watch the gray yards of the road slip under his wheel. The fog spiraled down from the hillsides as the way descended, and now and then a black, dripping boulder hulked out of the gloom, almost at his shoulder. When the going grew rougher, he slowed down, for he knew there were places where he would have to drag the motorcycle over rocky creek beds and bump up and down steep declivities with extreme caution.

"Seems like I remember two pretty good stretches when we hiked in over this trail," mused Jimmy. "When I hit 'em, I'll loosen her up. Got to make it by twelve, but there's oodles of time if nothing happens. That's it—a trifling little slide or tumble, and the colonel wouldn't

have these papers until nightfall! So, careful, old boy—slow, there!"

There had been two motor wheels available when Jimmy got his first instructions, and discretion would have prompted the sending of two runners, but the other cycle was found to be out of service at the last moment. Anyhow, Jimmy, with his usual confidence in himself, preferred to be alone.

"One fellow would hold back for the other, and slow us both down," he argued to himself. "Besides, I remember the road better than most of 'em."

Out of the fog he clattered presently to the first dry creek crossing. The first rains a few days before had left scant pools below the ford, but it was the thick rubble and jagged rock fragments that bothered. Then he had to drag and push his machine up a steep dirt bank and then wobble uncertainly for three hundred yards among more stones; and when he found the smoother road above he was perspiring and sore. Back across this first little canyon he could just make out the slope through the mists.

"Right lonesome trail!" muttered Jimmy, and

then he glanced up the other way along the ridge. And for the moment his eyes rested there, he allowed the wheel to jerk crazily off the trail into a crevice, which brought him out of his saddle with a jar. Instantly he was up and going over his cycle with searching care, motor, gear and tires.

"Look closer, old boy," he breathed, and then stopped wonderingly. "I thought I saw something up there! Yes, sure—into the fog!"

Into the fog of the ridge to his left there vanished a gray ghost. An almost naked figure, gaunt, tall, vague; but from the peculiar lope of the stride Corporal May knew at once, with a quickening of his breath, what it was. He had seen a few of the Yaqui runners in the two months' service over near the Sonora border—those hardy unconquerable *Indios* of Northwestern Mexico, famed for their fleetness of foot and untiring strength. Army guides and border rangers had told the Yankee soldiers incredible stories of the distance runners of the high Sierra; of warriors, too, that the Mexicans themselves had never subdued, but many of whom had been drawn from their western fastnesses to join

Villa's famous hard-riding, quick-shooting *dorados.*

"And what's that fellow doing here?" muttered Jimmy. "No friend of mine, that's certain! Trailing me—up on that ridge—keeping ahead of me from pass to pass! Wonder if he's got a gun? Why he could snipe me most anywhere along here!"

Cautiously he let his machine speed up as it climbed to smoother going on the hill road. He felt of the packet of dispatches in his coat, then loosened his automatic pistol in his holster. Down one side loomed the farther side of the canyon, up on the other the misty ridge top. Nowhere was the mysterious runner to be seen. But he was somewhere ahead! The "hog-backed" ridge gave him the inside track, while the dispatch rider followed the road around the slope, as Jimmy dubiously reflected, so only high speed would allow one to distance him.

"He hasn't a gun or he'd have sniped me at the ford," reasoned Jimmy, "but he can pick his ambush in the rough places. And he's sure after me—else he'd take the trail I'm on!"

Then came a mile of decent going and Jimmy

took comfort in the swift clatter of his motor as the machine flashed through the fog. Then the trail broke down an *arroyo,* rock-filled and crooked, and each time that Corporal May bumped around the huge boulders in the mist-wreathed canyon he had a distinct impression of how easy it would be for the gaunt, cat-like Yaqui to spring and cut him down from behind with his long, heavy knife. The trouble was that with the motorcycle it was absolutely impossible to keep watch behind. Whether poking slowly ahead with the motor filling the little gulch with its clatter, or afoot, dragging the wheel where he could not ride, Jimmy simply had to be looking ahead and not into the damp, foggy spaces between the big rocks.

"If that fog would only lift," he muttered, "I could see twenty feet on each side; even then a fellow couldn't spot an Indian who's exactly the same color as these wet boulders."

But he got through the worst of the rubble, climbed a few rods, stopped, looked, listened. Nothing was to be seen or heard in this gray, dripping world. Lightly Jimmy swung into the saddle, sending the speed to high power and took

a desperate chance on climbing the hillside. Suddenly he checked a yelp of joy—the machine dodged a last curve and accelerated with a roar, squarely on top of the long ridge, and there seemed a broad stretch across a level *mesa* top ahead.

"Oh, you copper-skinned Marathon kid!" sang out Corporal May jubilantly. "Here's where the white man's gasoline will break the heart of you!"

Jimmy tore on with the swiftness of the wind. Desperate chances he took on the level rock road, but he reasoned this was his time to gamble. Down in a gentle gully, bumping the bottom, rising with savage vibrations of the straining frame, the white man's devil horse surged onward. When he struck the *mesa* again, the road was smooth as a parkway, and again Jimmy whooped his nervous triumph. It seemed that the mountain mists were lifting over the gloomy canyons. To his left Jimmy glanced for a second, and there he saw, in the thinning mists a quarter of a mile away, a figure silhouetted—the Yaqui runner speeding on!

"Say!" gasped Jimmy, "how did he do it? In-

side track—that's it—always the inside track of me! But wouldn't Yale give a leg for you—in the distance events?"

The level road smoothed out so that Jimmy found opportunity to glance off admiringly at the Indian runner. Almost with a true sportsman's sense of fair play he saw regretfully that the Yaqui was losing rapidly now. Nerve, sinew and lung were no match for the Yankee's machine of gas and steel. Bending over his handlebars, staring ahead, then with swift glances back, Jimmy saw the iron-hearted runner dimming in the far mists.

"Got his Nanny!" whispered Jimmy. "He'll quit, now he sees what he's up against!"

And the next glance over the level rocky *mesa* showed nothing but the fog spirals coming up from the canyon beyond. Jimmy ceased his fears.

"Orders is orders," he murmured, "as Perkins would say. The orders was to beat you, and of course we went and did! Some day, weapons barred and the sun a-shining, I'd like to clock that fellow!"

Two miles more he followed the curving reach

of road over the table-land, and then sank gradually through a cleft of the rocks to a dim valley. Slowly Jimmy bumped down this way. It was more than half way, he calculated, and the rest of the road would follow *Arroyo Seco* Creek until he reached the regimental cantonment on the communication line to the border base.

"All over but the shouting!" smiled Jimmy. "And friend Yaqui gave the ride just the punch it needed. Kept me from being lonesome!"

When he reached the rocky flat of *Arroyo Seco* the road meandered off under the first trees he had seen, squat, dripping oaks, tangled in mists; and among the pebbles and rubble were patches of gray sand and water spaces. But Jimmy floundered over safely, found the road down the creek, and went on at a decent speed. When it roughed a bit, he slowed; when there was any sort of going, he touched up the motor; and finally, looking at his watch, he was amazed to find it was but half-past ten! Surely he was not more than eight miles from the camp. He would run onto outposts up this road any time now, be challenged and pass them importantly as a special dispatch bearer to Colonel Wallis.

Then Jimmy would deliver his papers, await orders and loaf among the other regimental noncoms the rest of the day telling of his friend, the Yaqui Marathon chap, up in the high hills.

The bend of the creek took him far to his left around the shoulder of the great *mesa,* and Jimmy had to chug across the pebbly bottom time and again where the road wound. On the lower levels the vegetation grew denser and the fog hung darker. Jimmy was wheeling down a last rough bit and out on a sandy patch among the pebbles of the creek bar, to go up a tree-darkened opening on the farther bank, when out of the brush there whirled a figure with incredible swiftness.

And the next instant—Crash! Into the fore-wheel of his machine there came a rock, heaved out unerringly as the cave man must have fought his enemies. The force of it sent the rider slipping off onto the narrow ford, and Corporal May cleared his legs of the motorcycle just in time to land on his feet. Swift as thought his hand went back for his revolver; but just as swiftly he had to raise his arm to ward off the knife aimed at his neck. Then Jimmy's other

arm locked about a naked, wet body. No time for the gun then. In a second all Corporal May's alertness was needed to prevent that long, sinewy knife arm from folding over to strike him in the side. He got his own hand around the Yaqui's wrist and held it wide out, and then they struggled breathlessly, without a word or sound save their feet on the gravel.

The Yaqui wore nothing save a breech cloth, and his wet body heaved against the American's damp khaki breast. Back and forth, up and down, they wrestled, each grimly knowing that the knife or pistol would decide it, could the other free himself for a blow or shot. Jimmy got his head under the tall Indian's chin and butted savagely again and again. The savage was not used to this boxer's rough trick and he gasped. He was breathing hard and Jimmy swiftly realized that the fellow, cutting down from the *mesa* "across-lots" to head off the motorcycle, must have come a wearing pace. He arrived in time, but he was not expecting to engage in a hand-to-hand combat with a lusty *Americano* soldier at the finish.

And the Indian knew nothing of wrestling;

he finally began to make spasmodic jerks backward, carrying Jimmy with him, in an endeavor to free his knife hand. Jimmy was grimly realizing that at last he had the upper hand over his slippery foe; if only he could snatch at his pistol holster!

Jerk after jerk the Yaqui gave to his slippery arm.

"Let him have it!" thought Jimmy. "I'll jump back, too, and draw!"

And then, like a knell to his hopes, he heard a clatter on the rocks. His blue automatic pistol had fallen. In the struggle it was soon left a rod away. "Then I just got to handle you!" muttered Corporal May, "or good-night to the dispatches, and me, too!"

The foeman's drawn, lean face was close to Jimmy's own, with the dark eyes glaring. He tried to bite at the American's neck and Jimmy hurled his head back with smashing lunges of his shoulder. Try as he might he could not bend the Indian's knife arm back or down. To hold it out and locked tight, at the wrist, was the best Jimmy had. His own strength was ebbing now. "Maybe he's got me," thought the Corporal,

He could not bend the Indian's knife arm back or down.

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"winded and beaten, but maybe he can out-game me, too!"

They were both exhausted now, fighting and reeling over the cobbles.

"Throw him!" Jimmy muttered, and suddenly he let go his left hand from under the Yaqui's shoulder, seized him lower and then lifted. The next second he had his enemy in the air and staggering blindly back he swung the lean body high as he could and let go. Six feet away Jimmy, half-blinded by his own sweat, saw the Indian strike, but like a cat, upon his feet, and then stumble to his knees. With his last strength Corporal May rushed to beat him down.

But he saw the foeman floundering forward on hands and knees just as he realized that his own feet were heavy in thick, wet sand. Then Jimmy also came down on all fours.

There, six feet apart, the two combatants crouched glaring at each other. And Jimmy saw a sudden curious fear grow over the Yaqui's face.

"Quicksand!" gasped Corporal May.

Up he struggled, freeing his arms with an effort. That last wild rush had put them both off

the pebble bar into the treacherous pool, of which neither knew. The very force with which Jimmy hurled his enemy had put them both deep in the clinging wet sand. The American knew that the Rio Grande abounded in quicksands, but of their nature he had no inkling, nor that this creek ford had held danger for him. He was too tired to struggle for a moment. Then as he saw the Indian much farther from the pebble bar than himself, struggling to keep his body from the stuff, Jimmy tried to jerk himself up. But he was above his knees in the cold, slimy sand. It lapped him along his arms where the water oozed out and wet his face; and when he broke from this position it merely forced his legs lower. Presently he stopped struggling to get his wind. And there across six feet of the deadly quicksand, stretched full length and watching him in sullen hopelessness, was his lean, gaunt, tired foeman, the Yaqui of the Sierra Madre.

The Indian muttered something. But Jimmy understood nothing. Grimly he raised his own hand and motioned towards the bank, so near and yet so far beyond reach. The Yaqui nodded. There was life for them both. Here was death

—the sure death which each had tried to bring to the other. Jimmy watched the dark, naked back of the Indian, lying outlined above the sand yet slowly settling to the depths.

"He ought to fight out," muttered Corporal May. "Not a thing to drag him down except sandals and loin cloth. But me—boots and belt and cartridges and heavy clothes! I'm gone, that's all."

He knew his strength was utterly sapped now. He could twist his body to the hips. Below that he seemed locked in a vise, and his belt and jacket were gripped by the sucking sand and slowly wormed below the surface. Jimmy turned his head again to regard his foeman.

"Fight!" he shouted. "Make a break for it!"

But the fellow seemed to look upon death now with the stoicism of the savage. Perhaps he was even more exhausted than the white man.

"If I were stripped," groaned Jimmy, "I'd snake out of here. Wait—here, you!"

Corporal May was trying to drag his arms out of his heavy coat. It was difficult, but at length he had it off, and then, unbuckling his belt, he laid them both out on the soft, wet sands and tied

one sleeve of the coat to the belt buckle. Then, lying back, one shoulder sinking in the stuff, he whirled the belt and the coat and flung them towards the savage. The pistol holster lay two feet from the Yaqui's face. Jimmy saw him regard it mutely.

"Drag yourself," roared Jimmy. "Get a hold, man!"

For a moment Jimmy forgot that the naked hillman had been but a short time ago seeking his life. They were simply two doomed men struggling against a common fate. When the Yaqui reached slowly for the leather belt, drew it cautiously, and then with a mutter, as of warning to the American, put his whole weight against the pull, Jimmy watched him breathlessly.

"It's his chance," muttered the Corporal. "If I get him loose, maybe he can make that old root by the bar. I never could—I'm a dead weight in this stuff!"

Then, as he felt the steady drag of the Indian's body on the twisted coat and belt, Jimmy tensed his own back in the quicksand. With all his strength he held to the cloth, knowing that every

ounce pulled him deeper into the mire, but that the snakelike figure of the Yaqui could gain all and more than he lost. Lower, deeper, Jimmy's breast went as he stiffened like a human anchor in the sands. The stuff was to his armpits now, and the pressure was intolerable. He felt as if he were being pulled in two at his stomach, and his breath was constricted so that he was gasping. And he could not see the Yaqui now, for the pull had drawn Jimmy over on his back, so that he could only stare up in the gray fog. But he felt convulsive struggles and heavings on the life line. Jimmy's fingers ached with the grip on that wet, twisted coat.

And then, suddenly, upon his shoulder, there came a lean hand. Throwing back his head against the sand, he stared right into the face of the Yaqui.

"Go on, now, you!" gasped Corporal May. "Keep moving—right over me!"

For an instant the savage looked down in the white boy's face with a curious, grim smile. Astonishment, suspicion, almost a bit of fear were in his eyes. He had dropped the army belt now and was dragging his outstretched legs on past

the Corporal. Jimmy could not see him soon, for try as he might, he could not turn until he had dug one shoulder out of the sands. But he could hear the Yaqui gasping with the struggle to roll his body on above the treacherous surface.

"Making it?" whispered Jimmy. "Safe—and now—what'll he do? Got me like a rat, if he wants!"

And presently came a soft rustle in the pebbles of the solid bar.

Jimmy twisted about so that he could see, and there, upright, dripping in the fog, stood his enemy looking about into the creek brush and up, and then back to the *Americano* lying silent and trapped out on the quicksands. So long he stood that Jimmy closed his eyes in bitterness and contempt.

"Dirty snakes—that's what they all are! And I took a chance—with a fellow who tried to knife me in the back!"

The sands were lapping Jimmy about the shoulders and almost over his breast as he lay on his back curved down in the stuff. He was too done for to struggle more; even his speech had failed him now. His arms were above the sur-

face, and he noted that both his hands were trembling with the chill and weakness.

"Well," he muttered, "sneaking off, I guess! Why doesn't he pin me through with some fancy knife throwing if he's still got it! I took a chance and lost—but I won't beg nothing of him—the snake!"

Then he opened his eyes to stare again into the fog. He had heard a slight crackling of the brush somewhere. Then the soft footsteps on the pebble bar again. And then, very softly, out of the mist:

"Hombre? Hombre!"

Jimmy turned his head to see the Yaqui standing like a statue but poised with a long streamer of the tough, wild grapevine which bordered the creek. When the Indian knew that the boy had seen it he hurled the curve of it so that it fell across Jimmy's breast and lay all along across the six feet of quicksand. The Yaqui muttered something. Jimmy weakly laid hold of the grapevine, but his fingers seemed dead. Again the Indian called, and then pulled gently. Then he saw that the white boy could not hold to the life line. He was back in the brush now, drag-

ging at the driftwood. Presently he staggered out with an eight-foot log of half-rotted oak. Upending this he let it fall near Jimmy's head, and went for another, and then another piece, and crossing one over the other, he came slipping out on this slowly sinking pontoon. He was kneeling over the tangle of grapevine staring down into the other's face. Vainly he dragged at the white boy's shoulders. Then he grunted away his discomfiture, he seized upon the leather belt and reached to buckle it deep in the sands under Jimmy's armpits. And all the time neither had a word to say. Corporal Jimmy was too done up to whisper.

The Yaqui knew not a word of English apparently. About Jimmy's sinking shoulders he placed the wood chunks, forcing them down and then fastened the grapevine into the soldier's belt. Now and then he looked into Jimmy's face inquiringly, shook his head and continued his work. He slipped ashore on his sinking bridge, got more driftwood, threw it on the sands, building himself a solid foothold, and then he began to drag and ease and drag and ease, slowly, inch by inch.

"Wait!" gasped Corporal Jimmy. "*Hombre,* you're killing me!"

The Indian paused doubtfully. And again he heaved up on that leather, which was cutting into Jimmy's ribs and forcing the last breath out of his lungs. Suddenly the fog and treetops about the Yaqui's snaky hair grew pitch dark to the eyes of Corporal May. He fainted dead away; and then, after seeming hours of oblivion, he was conscious of being mauled and rolled and pounded, and finally knew he was lying face down on the round hard pebbles of the creek bar.

He got a long breath after a while. Some one was dragging at his wrists, hauling him on over sticks and vines and into grass, and then dropping him like a sack of corn by the roadside. He was left for a moment and then his head was lifted and water was poured from a cupped hand between his lips.

Jimmy opened his eyes to look straight into the impassive face of the hillman. The Yaqui did not smile; his grim, lined face merely took on a new interest as if pleased in a detached way at his success.

He set the Corporal up against a stump and

stood off looking at him thoughtfully. Jimmy leaned forward presently, to see the Yaqui back on the pebble bar. At the edge of the quicksand he picked some object up and examined it solicitously.

"Got his knife again," muttered Corporal May. "Well——"

Then Jimmy motioned and pointed to his smashed motorcycle lying on the ford. The Yaqui nodded, and dragged the machine clumsily up the trail to drop it by the Corporal's side. Jimmy began unstrapping the little leather kit box behind the seat. Then he extended something to his foeman. "Here, *hombre!*" he murmured.

The Yaqui took the corned beef and hard bread. Jimmy was feeding himself, and ravenously hungry he felt too. The life began to come back to his legs and a bit of ease to his strained back. When finally he groped to his feet, the Indian was still squatted tearing at the meat and bread.

Jimmy felt in his pocket for the damp packet of dispatches. He looked at his watch and muttered:

"Going to be an hour late, sure! But it can't be more'n three miles to the outposts now."

He stamped weakly around, trying to stifle his groans at the pain in his back and limbs. Then he motioned across the ford and growled unintelligibly to the Yaqui:

"Going, *hombre!* Sabe? Me—go!"

And the savage arose, casting away his food. Tall and gaunt as a wolf, his copper skin still dripping sand and dirty water, he watched Corporal May, who was trying to slap more life into his dead muscles.

Then the Yaqui smiled. His lean, hard hand went out.

"Amigo!" he murmured. *"Amigo—Americano!"*

And as Corporal May released his fingers, the Yaqui slipped like a ghost into the fog-wrapped underbrush. Jimmy turned on his own trail.

"Amigo!" Jimmy said, "I pass it to you—friend, and first-class fighting man!"

Two hours later Corporal May, special courier, without his motorcycle, limped into the regimental camp, escorted from the sentry lines

by a puzzled sergeant. He handed over his dispatches to the adjutant and saluted.

The officer glanced Jimmy over closely: "You look, sir, as if you had met the enemy?" he said with a quizzical smile, for he thought the motorcycle rider had met nothing more than a bad spill in some mountain creek.

"I think, sir," answered Corporal Jimmy, "that I met a—friend!"

"Well," responded the adjutant, "take six hours off duty and then report here to carry back some cheering news to your company commander, sir. The expeditionary force has been ordered back to United States soil, and I think you'll all be glad."

Jimmy gasped his surprise.

"Glad, sir? Yes, sir—but I hope it means active service somewhere. That's why I enlisted, sir!"

"I think, Corporal, that your wish will be gratified. Your regiment is going to Jackson Barracks and will be expanded to full war strength on the European model—3,600 men. It may mean something—possibly."

The officer turned away, wondering why, per-

haps, he was gossiping with this grave-faced and dirty infantry corporal. But Jimmy was filled with a sudden vision of great adventure: His Country was poised on the verge of the world war—was that it?

CHAPTER VII

CORPORAL MAY PICKS A STRANGE RECRUIT

CORPORAL Jimmy May stood on the pavement before the United States recruiting office in New Orleans, watching with a keen, military eye the loitering young men and curious passers-by that stopped to look at the bright, new recruiting posters which called the sons of Uncle Sam into their country's service.

Then his glance went up to the Stars and Stripes above the door, his fingers went to his hat brim in a salute, and a grin came over his bronzed, lean face, on which the sun and wind of the Mexican campaign still had their mark.

"Right-o!" he murmured, "somewhere in France next time! Well, I wish some of these slackers loafing over there in the park would come to the scratch. Shame that we have to beg 'em and plead with 'em, while we carry the bulk of the load."

Two men had stopped before the posters. The

younger was a military-looking chap, fair and pleasant, and the older, a heavier fellow with the air of a countryman. They read the posters, murmured something, and laughed. Corporal May was about to accost them in friendly fashion and call attention to the need and advantages of enlistment this week, when all the country was thrilling with the call to arms, when down the stairs from the recruiting office came an alert sergeant of the Coast Artillery and brushed past. Sergeant Benson turned to Corporal May of the Infantry.

"We'll relieve you at twelve sharp, Jimmy. I'm sent to the city police station to get two of our fellows out of some little rumpus and send 'em down the river to their company. The Heavy Artillery is going to lay mines this week—two companies on the job, and shorthanded at that."

"Mines?" said Jimmy. "News to me!"

"Sure! Nobody's supposed to know it, not even you doughboys! But submarines in the river passes could crack a dozen ships and get away to some base in the Gulf before the merchant marine woke up to it. So we——"

The veteran artillery sergeant stopped sud-

denly. Jimmy saw his eyes shift sharply to the two strangers, who appeared to be reading the posters.

"Sort of forgetting yourself, aren't you?" murmured Jimmy, and his look measured the two men. The elder was listening rigidly. Jimmy caught a distinct start of surprise in the other at Benson's unwary words. Even the non-commissioned officers and privates, busied this week in all manner of activities when the President's call to arms had sounded, had felt the sense of espionage, in barracks and in the city, of which the officers had warned them.

Corporal May had been detailed from Company B's post at Jackson Barracks to the New Orleans recruiting office, particularly because regimental officers reposed trust in his discretion as well as his personality as a soldier, and so each day Jimmy had stood his trick out in the street to aid the enlistment. It was a great change from the dust and heat of Chihuahua, but after a week of it Jimmy would gladly have been back to barracks drilling the rookies. Still, this was real and highly important service, and Corporal May talked and argued with dozens of fellows

every day and induced them to go upstairs to the recruiting office, where the officers in charge explained further the needs of the service. And in and out of the office sauntered keen-eyed men in civilian clothes whom Jimmy came to know as agents of the United States Secret Service working in conjunction with the Army, the Navy, and the port officials to guard government property, keep the secret of the coast defense plans, and ferret out any disloyal intrigue in the city. The sense of mighty events happening in the nation's capital stirred all of Jimmy's fervent patriotism, and quickened his feeling of service as vitally as if he were in the fighting line instead of standing on duty on a crowded street corner.

"Well, so long, Jimmy! Business as usual, and a fellow ought to keep his mouth shut about things, eh? I'm off to the down river forts tonight, and I won't see you on this detail again, I hope. Plenty of work now!"

But Corporal May did not look after the departing artilleryman. The older man of the two reading the posters seemed to be listening keenly, as if to catch more of Benson's words.

"Mining the river passes," murmured Jimmy

to himself, "and my guess is that these fellows are interested somehow or other!" Then he walked briskly before the two, speaking so that they had to face him squarely.

"Better go up, boys," he suggested smoothly. "Chance for clean, real service coming—any branch of the army. Step up and talk to Lieutenant Gregg, and——"

But he was talking to no one. The elder man had shrugged and turned so that Jimmy did not see his face clearly. And Corporal May started.

"Say!" he muttered. "I've seen that fellow! Down on the Rio Grande—somewhere about the McAllen camp—peddling to the fellows, sure he was!"

But the two had vanished in the throngs. Jimmy pondered. So strong was the impression that the stranger had been around the border camps, and also that he had swiftly appreciated Benson's unguarded remark about the Coast Artillery's secret work, that Jimmy reported on it when he came off duty.

"Just an idea of mine, sir," he concluded.

Lieutenant Gregg, in charge of the office,

looked at Corporal May thoughtfully. He had heard something of Jimmy's record from B Company's officers.

"Quite right. There are defense plans being carried out, of course. While it's none of your concern, sir, you are quite right to report your suspicions. And an order has come for you to report to your commanding officer at Jackson Barracks at two o'clock, sir."

Jimmy saluted and turned cheerfully away. He was used to feeling that his superior officers were studying him sharply, measuring his intelligence, his rigid sense of discipline, and self-reliance. So, when he descended from the street car at Jackson Barracks and passed the sentry of the old-fashioned post snuggled behind the Mississippi levee, he reported to Lieutenant Miller with a feeling that he would be put to something more important than drilling rookies and squad inspections.

He looked at the great starry flag floating above the green sward, and then off to the grim black destroyers poking their way up the yellow flood of the Mississippi, pouring down from the heart of all America, and a great contentment

filled his soul. By land and sea, in far-off lonely ports and in the great, seething cities, the flag today had a new, proud meaning—it meant liberty, justice and good faith to millions of foreign people; it was calling its sons to arms, not for conquest, but to resist conquest, as it had always done, and Jimmy stretched out his fist and shook it with a mighty pride. Great or small the service, it was good to be a soldier, doing his bit for the principles the flag stood for against the kings and emperors.

He joined the non-com's mess, went through the routine of reporting, and then watched the nervous rookies at squad drill and setting-up. He himself was a veteran now, with a year's hard Mexican service behind him and his corporal's chevrons, and he could study for a commission in the new army, conscious that his exploits across the border had secured him a record to be proud of. He had been detailed to special duty so often that when, after retreat, the first sergeant ordered him to report to the regimental adjutant, he took it with composure.

"They don't keep you in the company long enough to renew acquaintance," grumbled Per-

kins, Jimmy's old bunkie of border days. "Now what's your game, Corporal?"

Jimmy laughed and went off. At headquarters he merely got a laconic order to report to the commanding officer at Fort St. Philip, down river.

But once outside the adjutant's office, he met his company commander, Lieutenant Miller, who stopped him with visible interest. "Report to the quartermaster for transportation. And Corporal!"

"Yes, sir?"

"If it happens that you have any recollection of accosting two strangers in front of the recruiting office in the city, why just keep them in mind. You are wanted to identify certain persons suspected of espionage upon certain government work that is being done down the river."

"Yes, sir," answered Corporal Jimmy, but when he had turned on his way to the station, he whistled softly: "Quick work, somewhere! And I wonder what *is* up?"

He had not been able to shake free of his own suspicions concerning one of the two strangers. On the border it hadn't mattered, but now, in

these new, thrilling days, with all sorts of rumors out of the activities of secret agents of the Imperial German Government, things were different. But Jimmy breathed not a word to his brother non-coms. He reported the next morning early at Fort St. Philip, one of the two old Civil War posts some sixty miles down the Mississippi, where already squads and companies of recruits were firing over the Government ranges, and he noted a more than usual guard detail patrolling the peaceful green river levees. An hour later he was shown into a room where there were half-a-dozen sullen civilians, and he knew that the post commandant and the other officers present were watching him expectantly. But Jimmy recognized none of them.

"We were informed, Corporal, that you had special information that might assist in corroboration with some evidence that we have concerning these men. You have never seen any one of them before anywhere?"

"I am afraid not, sir. Certainly the men I reported upon are not among them."

The artillery officers looked chagrined. A few more questions and Corporal May was dis-

missed. That ended it as far as he was concerned. He messed with the garrison non-commissioned officers, and then was sent across the river to catch the train at the little terminal station. It was almost dusk when Jimmy settled himself in the dingy little coach, pulled a magazine from his pocket and then—he found his eyes fixed on the back of a passenger five seats in front of him. Then, as the train was jolting out in the dusk among the orange groves, Jimmy gasped.

"Three times for you!—you were playing the peddler down on the border; then you were loitering around army offices in town; now you're down the river around the military reservations. And I'll sleuth you when you get off the train, old boy, orders, or no orders! And report to the Secret Service!"

Hunching down in his seat, pretending to read, Jimmy evaded a casual glance the farmer-looking chap gave back in the car. Jimmy's campaign hat was off, and the top of his head offered no identification. So the stranger sat easily back. It was not until the train was slowing to another station that he moved. He looked out the window. From his seat Jimmy also looked. But

few idlers were there. Then Jimmy noted a young man sauntering carelessly down the platform. Directly under the stranger's window he stopped and faced out, his arms folded as if intent on the peaceful country landscape beyond the station.

And then Jimmy, watching along the car side, gasped. A hand was thrust from the stranger's window, and something dropped—over the shoulder of the man outside!

Corporal May was on his feet instantly. The train was lurching on slowly. Jimmy was about to arrest the man in the car, then he thought: "The other spy has the papers—whatever they are!" And, slipping back to the coach end, he dropped off and dashed about to the platform. The fellow was slipping to the tree-shaded roadside beyond the station.

"Stop that man!" yelled Jimmy. But the station agent only stared open-mouthed at the soldier. Apparently he had not even noticed the spy crossing the platform. Jimmy leaped to the dusty road, and then he saw the fellow was on a bicycle and tearing off at full speed. Jimmy stopped impotently. He didn't even have a

service revolver. Then, around the little railroad station house, he discovered a vegetable wagon with a bony horse between the shafts, and up on this Corporal May leaped with a warning yell to any luckless gardener who might be about. Gathering up the lines and whacking the astonished animal, he went clattering down the road after the rapidly vanishing bicyclist. Not that Jimmy hoped to overtake him; he was merely intent on keeping near the route of escape and arousing pursuit along the way. In the dusk he could hardly see the fellow now.

But bumping along he suddenly had a hope of action.

"This road's getting rougher near the big woods—that fellow'll have pretty tough riding now. Get up, there—old bones!"

And Jimmy mauled his steed more lustily. Sure enough, he could see the fugitive wobbling uncertainly among the ruts of the swampy, dried-out ground beyond the cultivatable land. The light wagon jolted fearfully, as the old horse struggled on. The road led seemingly off into the big cypress woods, under which was a jungle of Latanier palms, bamboo briars, and mangrove

clumps. Clinging to his reins and watching the slow progress of the bicycle, Corporal May saw the spy suddenly leap from it, splash through a ditch and gain a hummocky pasture. Jimmy went over the end gate of his wagon and after him. They were both running now in parallel lines for the woods, but the spy was two hundred yards beyond the soldier.

Jimmy became entangled in a bit of thick brush for a moment, and as he was fighting his way through, he suddenly heard the muffled explosion of a gasoline motor somewhere beyond. Stumbling a yard farther through the palmettos, he was stopped by a forty-foot drainage canal that led, straight as an arrow, into the swamp forest. He stopped, gasping, looking along the still water; then he saw a ripple ahead and out from the bank a hundred yards above him, swung a tiny white launch. There was one man in it, bending over the motor, and Jimmy had no doubt who it was.

"Halt!" he roared. "Halt or I fire!"

But the other paid no heed. He was working desperately with the engine, and a moment more, the "put-put-put" of the exhaust told that he

was succeeding. The man lunged back to the stern and grabbed the tiller.

Jimmy wasted no more breath in bluffing the spy. He was fighting his way along the bank, but when he reached the water again, the launch was speeding on towards the depths of the forest. And a wrathful, discomfited regular army man stood perspiring and fighting the mosquitoes on the canal bank. Duty told him to follow and arrest the conspirator, regardless of orders, and he knew it. But by the time he retraced his steps to the station and aroused the simple Creole people by the river levee, the spy would be deep into the wild swamps surrounding Barataria Bay, of which Corporal May knew nothing save that there were numberless channels, which none but a native could penetrate, leading to the Mexican Gulf.

He got back to the hummocky, wet land, and followed the canal towards the woods, hoping to meet someone who would aid or at least tell him the lay of the country beyond. At the edge of the timber he looked up at the gloomy plumes of the Spanish moss hanging from the cypress, and then at the silent pools of the watery forest.

"Blocked again!" muttered Jimmy, and stood listening wrathfully to the faint *"put-put"* of the launch engine. "Got the laugh on me, eh? We'll see!"

But he simply could not go afoot into the cypress swamp; he was amazed to discover that, only a mile from the mighty Mississippi, with the great steamships and battleships ascending to New Orleans, one could plunge into a primitive jungle. He went out on a log, trying to reach the canal margin, broke off a cane stalk and thrust it down eight feet into watery slime.

He went back dispiritedly and jumped from the log to the last bit of soggy ground around the base of a giant cypress. Then he sat down and proceeded to empty the water out of his shoes and think seriously.

"There was a made-up plan all right. Those fellows they had at Fort St. Philip may have been in it or not, but this other was sure! And he's got sketches or drawings of the mine fields down in the river passes, or of the coast artillery locations, and he passed 'em to another spy who's to deliver 'em somewhere else—*by water!* Say, there was talk of some secret wireless plant down

the Louisiana coast somewhere, and if the Germans had any submarine bases in the Mexican Gulf, why these fellows could reach 'em with all the dope on the river defenses! Sure, they could —and it's up to me to stop 'em, right off!"

He knew that the Government had ordered the seizing of all the amateur wireless plants along the coast, but the wild, uninhabited stretches of the Barataria waters offered any number of rendezvous. Also, down in the lonely shrimp camps and on the lugger fleets were adventurers of all nationalities—hardy men of unknown character and antecedents.

Corporal Jimmy stood up in the twilight gloom of the cypress swamp. Then something caught his eye, moving among the palmettos. Staring hard, he saw what he had supposed to be a half-sunken log, was a wooden dugout, and in it sat a little hunched-over figure, the oddest speciment of a man that Jimmy had ever laid eyes on. The stranger was staring at Jimmy, too, and now that he knew he was discovered, he coughed apologetically.

"Evenin', neighbor, evenin'!"

Corporal May stared the harder. It wasn't

an enemy, that was sure. But Jimmy was taking no chances. He waved his hand authoritatively and called:

"Come on out of there!"

The dugout man hesitated, then with a push of his paddle he swept his rough little pirogue out into open water and drifted near the soldier.

Then they looked each other over with interest. The stranger stood up, waved his paddle and murmured softly:

"Well, it done be an Awmy man!"

"Yes! And who are you?" Then Corporal Jimmy shouted abruptly: "And did you see a fellow making a getaway up this ditch to the swamp?"

"Yes, sah! goin' like all git-out! Reckon he's in a hurry fo' salt water!" Then the little old man looked doubtfully at Jimmy. "And so you're a Yank soldier? Why, I hardly seen one since the surrender!"

"Yankee?" Corporal May looked over his olive khaki and then at the other. The little man waved his hand joyously. His feet were encased in old sections of rubber boots tied together with twine; his scarecrow clothes seemed about to fall

from him, but his blue eyes twinkled under a faded gray cap, which Jimmy recognized at once as the sort that the soldiers of the Confederacy wore in '61. "Yankee?" repeated Jimmy, "why, I'm a regular, that's what! And you—who the dickens are you, anyhow?"

"Me? First time, sah, I been out o' the deep swamp in forty years! I'm one of the ol' boys that never surrendered! Lee surrendered and Johnson surrendered, and Captain Marmaduke of my ol' bat'ry surrendered, but I retreated to the deep swamp in '65, and the hull Gov'ment couldn't get me out!"

Corporal May of the Regular Infantry stood up higher on his log and stared. Then he laughed, and the more he looked at the blue-eyed old rebel who never had surrendered, the more he laughed. Then he checked it, seeing a glint of fire in the old man's glance, and answered:

"Good for you, Old Scout! That's the stuff! But what you here for, now?"

"Heard the Gov'ment was in a big war, Son! So I took my old john-boat and my shotgun, and shut up my dawgs in camp and started out front, fo' I said: 'It's all done now. Fifty years

I stuck out and the Gove'ment never did dast come in and take me'; but now I come out free and fair, and if the Gov'ment needs me, Son, you tell 'em Old Man Captain is right yere!"

"I guess the Government is sitting up anxious about you right now, Captain. Worried for fifty years, because you wouldn't surrender."

"Never done surrender, Son! I come out free o' my own will to help fight the Kaiser! Yes, sah, right yere, boy—and I'm glad the first man I met was an Awmy man—nobody else would understand me at all, now, would they?"

Corporal Jimmy looked the old swamper over—a little nervous bundle of fire and eagerness under his pitiful rags, with all his seventy-odd years—and suddenly an idea struck him.

"Say, Old Man Captain! Do you know this swamp?"

"Do I? I know the hide and hair of every muskrat from here to Four League Bay! Trapped and swamped and picked moss since '65, and never poked my head out of hearin' of the frawgs and the owls and the 'gators!"

"Then I enlist you right here! Listen! That man in the launch is a spy—he got away with

the plans of the mine fields down at the river passes, and he must be stopped before he gives 'em to some other hands. Up that canal and to salt water, eh? Can you trail him down?"

"Only one way he can take, Son. That drainage ditch'll take him to a bayou that opens on Bastian Bay and the Austrian shrimp camps. Unless he's a better swamper than I am, he can't go anywhere else. And he'll have a fight of it, too, in the lily jams with that launch."

Corporal Jimmy came splashing to the dugout's side. "Captain, if you could stop him—head him off somewhere! Isn't there a way?"

"One chance that nobody but a deep swamp man could take. Through the cypress, drag and paddle, paddle and drag; but I could cut off eight miles of his run. The last stretch of his canal is jammed with lilies."

"Good! You're enlisted, Captain! Come on now, both of us, and if you pull this off the Government won't care if you never surrender!"

Old Man Captain was pushing his leaky craft around excitedly: "In, boy! I'll show you some swamp trails that no one has ever seen 'cept me. Steady in this dugout. She never was cut for

two! Now, you lie low and keep out of the limbs and cane while I dig through this brush!"

Then began a struggle with push pole and paddle from pool to pool in the dark trails of the flooded forest. How the doughty old soldier of the South ever found his way in the intense gloom was a poser to Jimmy May. He himself crouched in the bow of the pirogue, helping at nothing, save when the limbs and the canebrake and palmettos offered him a chance to pull the craft on. In the stern, Old Man Captain stood poling the dugout, or when a bit of open water came, he sank back and plied his paddle. After half an hour Jimmy regretted starting on the venture. The sound of the motor was lost and the spy must certainly have reached his rendezvous on the open waters westward. But the old soldier denied this.

"He's slowed down by now—he'll be poling his heavy launch in the lily jams of Bayou Fontanelle, and we're cuttin' across his trail. We're most out of the big timber, Son, and then you can help with a paddle."

But the last hundred yards were the worst. They both had to heave overboard in muck to

their waists to force the dugout through the *isles flottantes*—the floating islands of grass bordering the cypress swamp. Then, muddy and tired, they crawled in the pirogue and, each with a paddle, sent it along in a shallow, tortuous bayou overhung with giant cane. But Jimmy could see nothing save the dim starlight. The old swamper steered and encouraged his passenger. And he asked numberless, eager questions.

Dim rumors of wars and world events filtered into his swamp refuge, but the old veteran had cared nothing until some wandering shrimp seiner had told him that America was threatened. Then out he had come to the settled lands to confirm the gossip.

"And first thing I meet an Awmy man and we go into active service!" he chuckled. "We'll trail that fellow clean to his nest, Son!"

Jimmy was bow-stroking the clumsy dugout in the free water, watching ahead in the dark, when the swamper stopped paddling. "Listen! Seems like there she be, Corporal! The rascal's engine, and he's just gettin' her started again after an hour's work through the lilies! We're fair abreast of his course, and in fifteen minutes

we'll strike the canal ahead of him, just where he comes to open salt water. Then nab him, eh?"

"Sure, we'll jump him!" Then Jimmy turned about to look at his companion in the light of a rising midnight moon. "But say, Captain, where's your old shotgun? That fellow'll be armed for trouble."

"My shotgun? Ain't you got it?"

"No!" Jimmy searched in the wet dugout among the traps and frying pans, and exclaimed: "Must have been knocked overboard, Cap'n, by the brush."

"Well, that's fine! She was loaded with buckshot, too—both bar'ls!" Then he dug on valiantly. "There! He's got his engine going! Got to stop him, boy, in the next mile or he'll be in the big bay water and shake his heels at us! Here, land her in the cane—we can cut over to where his canal opens on the bay. And then, fight, eh? What good's a soldier without his shootin' arms?"

Jimmy was dragging the pirogue up in the canebrake and then staggering on after the swamper, sinking to his knees. They had gained the low, rough line of the dredged canal ere he found time to think of their need of action.

Glancing up the shadowy line of the ditch in the light of the distorted moon, it seemed he saw the spy sweeping triumphantly past them out to the open bay. The canal was sixty feet wide and deep here, and there was not even a club or a rock with which one might defend the military secrets of his country. Then around a bend of the ditch came the snarl of the motor.

"Captain!" muttered Jimmy, "something's got to be done! Look out for that fellow to cut loose at us with an automatic, too!"

The old soldier was staring up the canal. Then he looked the other way. "Come, Son!" he whispered, and set off running down the dredged dirt line. Jimmy sped after him, not knowing what the game was. When he reached the marshy end of the dredge line, the old soldier was struggling with some vague object that was strung on a line of pickets over the shallows.

"Can you swim, Son?" gasped the swamper. "All right—heave over with the floats on this seine while I play it out. Lively across that canal, and we'll net Mr. Spy in something he never thought of!"

Jimmy seized the cork floats of the shrimp

seine that the captain thrust to him. Then he lunged out in the warm water, swimming slowly and dragging at the seine as the leads carried the lower margin of it down. The old soldier was unwinding it from the drying posts. Jimmy was half across the canal when the clatter of the engine broke out sharply not two hundred yards away. He swam desperately on, dragging the seine, for if the launch caught him midstream he would be entangled and drowned undoubtedly. But he was thinking more of tangling that propeller than himself.

"Netting submarines!" he muttered. "Well, seining spies is as good!"

Then his knees struck the soft mud on the farther point. On he staggered, seeking some anchor for his end of the net. But he could find nothing, and he heard the explosions of the launch motor now almost at his back.

Bending over, holding to the meshes drawn across his back, Jimmy floundered on. If the spy saw him and fired, at least it was too late to reverse the engine and escape the net. And the next instant, simultaneously with a startled cry from the moonlit canal, Corporal May was

jerked backward full length in the soft mud. Then he went crawfishing out into deeper water and glanced up to see the white bow of the launch swerving sharply athwart the stream almost over his head. And a mutter of surprised wrath came from the man in the boat. But not even yet did he realize that he had been trapped intentionally. He dashed forward and bent over the launch's sharp bow with an arm down to clear the obstruction. It was a luckier chance than Jimmy had hoped for—he was trying to avoid an encounter with an armed and desperate man. So he shrank under the sheering bow and when the fellow's arm came overside, Jimmy suddenly let go of the seine and boat and seized him about the shoulder. It was a complete surprise. With a powerful lunge backward, Jimmy dragged him half over the gunwale, and, fighting and screaming, the spy followed. The next minute they were both tangled in the seine among the line of floats. Jimmy heard a shout from the old swamper, but he had to keep on top of his man every second for fear the fellow would draw a pistol. The spy came savagely at him now, and Jimmy gathered a handful of the leaded portion

of the net and swung it heavily over his head. Then he knew that the old soldier ashore was dragging on the lines, and he kicked back from the mêlée. The spy was fighting the seine helplessly; suddenly a scared yell came from his lips.

"Ashore with him, Cap'n!" roared Jimmy. "Don't drown him—he's too valuable a fish!"

He plunged ashore himself and hauled on the lines. Another minute they had an utterly helpless man sinking in the mud and begging for aid. When they got him to the bank he was a bundle of mud and meshed leads and floats. Jimmy rolled him farther in.

"Now," he shouted, "have you a gun? Don't try any funny stuff on us!"

"Gun's in the boat!" groaned the other, strangling with muddy water. "Get me out, I'm done for!"

"I guess you are!" retorted Jimmy. "And next—those sketches of the mine fields that you got on the train, please."

"My packet," grumbled the prisoner; "I don't know what they are—I'm just to get them away. Where to, that's our business," he concluded sullenly.

"And our business. We'll ferret it out, all right. And you'll go to the forts, and Uncle Sam'll ask you to explain." Jimmy turned cheerily to his comrade who stood watchfully by and said: "I guess, old bushwhacker, Uncle Sam'll make it all right with you, too—even if you never did surrender since '61!"

But the old swamper shook his head: "I don't reckon on seein' anybody, Son. You are a likely boy and I took to you right away. And mebbe, now that the old war is over fifty years and more, and the new big war is on, I'll feel different. Now, I'll help you get this dirty spy out front to the river so's you can turn him over to your Gov'ment guards. Then I think, boy, I'll go back to the owls and the frawgs and the 'gators. But if I can help your Uncle Sammy I'll do it —havin' him understand that I'm still a real old Johnny Reb that never will surrender."

Old Captain Johnson winked, and Jimmy laughed. The captured spy staggered up and lurched down the road, with Corporal May and Captain Johnson keeping a watchful guard. Two hours later he put the fellow into a launch and delivered him, still sullen and refusing to speak,

to the astonished garrison officers at Fort St. Philip. Then Jimmy made a brief report of his night's work. And after it he heard a little consultation between a taciturn Major and a keen-eyed man in civilian clothes, whom Jimmy guessed was a secret service agent of the United States. At the end the officer turned to Jimmy with a casual dismissal.

"I think, Corporal, that you may learn something in a few days that will interest you. In the meantime you will preserve absolute silence about your recent adventure. Thank you, sir—in the name of your Country!"

CHAPTER VIII

WANTED: INTELLIGENCE

WHEN Corporal Jimmy May heard of the order detailing him to the Intelligence Department of the United States Army to work in conjunction with the Naval authorities and the Coast Guard Service in seeking out and closing unauthorized radio stations pursuant to the President's order in the first weeks of the war, he whistled softly and sat down on one of the benches facing the parade grounds at Jackson Barracks.

"Me?" he ejaculated, ungrammatically but with feeling, to Corporal Boyd; "and all because of my fool luck in chasing down the fellow who mapped out the river mine fields for some alleged nest of spies! Because I happened to run across Old Man Cap'n Johnson, late of the C. S. A., who never surrendered, and knows all the ins and outs of the delta swamps, why, headquarters thinks I have special information as to

what might be going on down in the shadowy haunts of the old pirate Jean LaFitte! Can you beat it?"

"You're going to be a bloomin' horse marine!" retorted Boyd solemnly. "But it's better than drillin' these rookies everlastingly, or getting assigned up to some officers' training camp, which is what I'm afraid of, before I get lined up to go after a commission myself. Intelligence orderly, hey? Now what the dickens *is* intelligence?"

"If I have to make a spring drive down into Barataria, I know what it'll be—it'll be getting your feet wet clean up to your chin. Old Man Cap'n comforted me before by saying I never even saw the deep swamp—he said there were tidal lakes and *chenieres* off westward of the passes where the Cajuns never even saw a steamboat or a telephone; and since their ancestors settled there a hundred years ago, after the Barataria freebooters were driven out, they've never learned a word of the English language."

"Well, so long, Hawkshaw, the Detectuff," jeered Corporal Boyd genially. "If you ever corral any intelligence, pass some to Private

Perkins, who's working his fat head off tryin' to qualify for a non-com. Intelligence, Jimmy, will help anybody."

Corporal Jimmy laughed cheerfully. Later he went out at Retreat with the company, erect, grave-faced, and trim, in his olive army cloth, and stood in the silent regimental order, as the great starry flag came down and the last strains of the stirring music floated over the green sward and the officers' ladies and the visitors banked before the quarters broke to applause at B Company's superb evolutions. Then he murmured a bit of regret.

"It's great to be with the lads again—simply great, for it's the crack infantry company of the post now, in spite of the rookies we took in. And here I go off on some lone detached duty, when the whole hive of 'em is buzzing with the big things and maybe service in France for us all."

When the ceremonial was ended and he was permitted to lounge on the green levee beyond the barracks road, Jimmy sat down and looked out over the swollen flood of the mighty Mississippi on its annual spring "headrise," and

sighed. He wondered if it wasn't possible for a fellow to be such a mighty good noncommissioned officer that he would be overlooked when the lieutenancies were handed around to the three-months' trained civilians and the older subordinates on reserve in the regulars. The noncoms were the backbone of any army, he knew well enough, and the regulars would be skinned of all available stuff to drill the new conscript forces, but there were many of the younger noncoms who would stick with all hard work and maybe no show for commissions. But Jimmy was not given to grouches; he jumped up, waved his hand joyously towards the barracks, and strolled to quarters.

"Let the old sergeants and corps go to it! I got my record, and I got my time coming. And somehow I'm not crazy about shoulder straps—I like to foregather along with my gang."

It had been his turn on the guard detail today, but then had come this sudden order to report for special duty again. At post headquarters he was assigned to a strange infantry officer, who looked him over with curt, critical interest. When the regimenal adjutant ex-

plained that Corporal May was taken on for this work because it was essential that the Intelligence officers procure a competent guide for the roadless and uncharted regions westward of the Mississippi passes, and the Department deemed Corporal May could give information of such, Corporal May himself could hardly repress a grin. He knew that trustful Uncle Sam was seeking to ferret out of his hole and use no less a character than Old Man Cap'n Johnson, trapper, swamper, fortune hunter, late of the C. S. A., who had retreated to the deep swamp in his rebel gray in '65, and had accordingly never surrendered to a Yank Gov'ment.

The adjutant waved his hand as if to leave all the details to Corporal Jimmy. "The particular matter, sir, is this: The properly constituted radio authorities under the Naval branch have been vexed in closing down the many amateur wireless plants on the coast and vicinity by discovering that there appears to be one or more that elude their closest surveillance. Fragments of a mysterious code are picked up, but are traceable nowhere. Whether it is an unlawful communication or not is uncertain, but it must

be ferreted out, regardless. The radio authorities are convinced that this wireless is based in some of the cypress jungles of the Louisiana coast and communicating to sea, and they request that the army lend its assistance from the down-river posts. We know, Corporal, that you once were assisted by a—a—guide, sir, who might be utilized in this work."

"Yes, sir—a—a—guide, that's what he appeared to be, sir!" answered Jimmy, but thinking of Old Man Cap'n and his ancient rubber hip boots tied together with cotton string.

"You will be assigned two men from your company, and report to the Post Commander at Fort St. Philip," continued the adjutant. "After that—" the officer motioned vaguely southward towards the mouth of the mighty river—"there's some preliminary matters, I believe."

And again Corporal May chuckled inwardly. He chuckled again the next morning when he discovered that the first sergeant had assigned to him for duty, Privates Perkins and Tolliver of his old border squad—one very short, fat, loquacious soldier, and one very tall, solemn, silent soldier; though, as Jimmy reminded him-

self, they made a fair average of what a bucky might be.

At the post down river, Corporal May reported and met his superior of the Intelligence Department again. Also he was pleased that the Navy people and the Coast patrol had been "stumped" by the mysterious wireless. There were shallows and flats and winding forest channels of the deep swamp where not even the lightest draft patrol launch could go, and besides, as Perkins remarked, the United States Navy never was any good in the mud.

"As I see this here job," continued Perkins, "what is required is a horse marine without his horse. What is needed is an alligator corps, for after one look into that jungle, Corporal, nothing but a 'gator will ever get through it."

"Wait," muttered Jimmy, "and cease your chatter. My orders are to get into communication with a certain unreconstructed and unconquered soldier of the late Confederacy, persuade him that the Civil War is over, and line him up for the United States to scout and map out this alligator swamp, so we can watch it for unlicensed radio stations. Now, this means work!"

For, after certain instructions and inquiries, Corporal May and his squad had been sent to the little railroad station which was the scene of Jimmy's adventure with the mine field spy, to hale Old Man Captain Johnson out of his hole and make use of him. The Army Intelligence officer also privately intimated that it would be no end of a joke if they could solve a mystery that had puzzled the Naval Radio Department, the Coast Guard, and the Secret Service. The Navy Yard wireless and the other authorized stations around the delta had fumed and fidgeted over these faint and unintelligible bits of code they were getting every day or so. They had closed every youthful amateur station not only in the city of New Orleans, but in every adjoining section of the Gulf Coast, "to insure the proper conduct of the war against the Imperial German Government and the successful termination thereof," as President Wilson had proclaimed, but still some crazy, enthusiastic radio student, or else some wary, traitorous enemy was buzzing away now and then, and no one could run him down.

Gradually they had narrowed the region of

activities into the wide-spreading cypress forests and tidal lakelets adjoining Barataria Bay, but a search through the navigable channels had uncovered nothing. There were great areas where none but a native "pirogue runner" could penetrate, where a man could neither wade, walk, swim, nor paddle a canoe; and to enlist a real denizen of the deep swamp seemed the only means of ingress.

Corporal Jimmy conducted his superior officer out on the last reaches of the hummocky road that ended in a drainage canal in the cypress. But the coast patrol had traveled this route half a dozen times to salt water and back, interviewed shrimp seiners below and moss pickers above, visited lonely alligator hunters' camps, poked into bayous until blocked by drifting hyacinth bloom or miles of "floating prairie," and was none the wiser.

"Hm," mused the Lieutenant; "I really think, Corporal, that it is up to you to find your mysterious old friend and get his ideas. The only thing certain is that this radio is working from some point entirely inaccessible to ordinary means of travel by water or land."

"There's plenty of that, sir, from what the old man said."

"Get word to him somehow, and fetch him out to the post, corporal."

"Yes, sir. But—he—well, it'll be hard to persuade him. He's scared of United States officers, sir. When he helped me before, it was a sort of personal favor, sir. You see, as he explained, he never surrendered—after the Civil War, he retreated to the deep swamp, and he swears that he's never laid eyes on the American flag in more than fifty years."

"What?" gasped the lieutenant—"Impossible!"

"Sounds so, sir. But there he was! Proud and touchy and lonely and poor, but honest as they make 'em, sir! Maybe a little bit crazy, too, but if any man can scout this swamp it's Old Man Cap'n Johnson! He trusted me, too, and if I can find him, I know he'll help."

"And bring him out to the river, sir! A man who's never laid eyes on the flag since '65 certainly must be introduced!"

Jimmy laughed soberly. When he had requisitioned a skiff from a dweller along the canal and

loaded his two men and their kits into it, he listened to the officer's general instructions. He was to secure the guide and report, unless something turned up whereby he could seize any unlawful plant discovered and arrest the operators at once, in order to prevent their escape. Jimmy was thankful for that. It gave him a long string to work on, and the authority to act if he needed it.

So three infantry regulars disappeared into the cypress swamp, with the taciturn Tolliver pulling the clumsy oars and Private Perkins forward slapping mosquitoes. Corporal Jimmy sat on the stern seat.

"At the end of this canal there's a shack occasionally occupied by a colored moss picker where Old Man Cap'n comes now and then to get his store goods and leave his pelts," he announced. "Now, we'll make that a base and scout for word of him."

Luckily they found the moss picker home, and after his fright at being questioned by three uniformed men was quieted, the negro volunteered that Old Man Cap'n had a camp "up in back" and had paddled out of the swamp only

last week to get some stores brought in from the river.

"Dat ole man been huntin' pirates' hide-ups fo' fou'ty years, and he's done trabbled every arpent of swamp and whut he doan' know 'bout dese parts ain't much," concluded this informant.

"Good," muttered Corporal May. "Now, get us into his camp."

The colored man stared at the bulky skiff. "Boss, I can take yo' six miles—afteh dat yo' got to be a swamp man, sho' nuff!"

"We'll take a chance. Show us the way."

And with the moss picker gliding ahead in his cypress dugout, the Intelligence detail of B Company rowed wearily on in devious and shallowing channels among the forest isles, and night came down when they were stopped by a seemingly impenetrable wall of prairie cane. The guide stood up and repeated his rolling *"Cooees!"*

"Boss, I gotta get back," he protested uneasily. "I wouldn't spend a night in dis swamp right yere for all de gold of de old pirate folkses!"

"Find your man first," ordered Jimmy sharply. "We're not going back until we see him."

And after many protestations the darky paddled into a narrow run of the canebrake. It was dusk in the cypress woods when he returned. "Found him, boss! He covered me with an ole gun and made me explain. When I told him it was de sojer dat he knew, he was mo' friendly. He'll come to you. An' boss, I gotta git out dis island—it's no place fo' culluhed folks afteh dark!"

The three soldiers of the Intelligence Department sat half an hour in the somber twilight under the moss-hung cypress. As Private Perkins remarked, they had no more chance of finding a way out of the swamp than a rabbit. They couldn't have pushed that clumsy skiff twenty yards in any direction over the morass of palmettoes, fallen logs, vines, and the sharp, evil spikes of the cypress jutting up through the black water.

"If you'd have told me we poled in here I wouldn't have believed it," murmured Perky, "except that I blistered both hands doing it. Al-

ligators, that's what we need, saddle-broke and rein-wise for three fool horse marines. Do you mean to tell me any human lives off in that cane-brake? It sure is a safe bet for a man who never surrendered!"

Corporal Jimmy had begun to have doubts of Old Man Cap'n as he watched the pirogue trail leading over the impassable peat soil of the cane. If the old Confederate didn't show up, and overcome his timidity before strangers, Jimmy had placed his squad in a ridiculous position. But as he stared at the yellow cane wall in the last light of sunset, he heard a soft *"Coo-ee!"* behind. Turning to glance at the forest, he discovered his old friend standing upright and motionless in his tiny dugout not ten yards away!

"Well, how?" gasped Jimmy. "We expected you the other way!"

"Howdy, Son! I just got the habit of coming in where folks ain't looking. I wanted to look you over, but here you be, same Awmy boy that was with me when we took the fellow in the canal."

"You bet! and I got more work for you, Cap'n. Why, the United States has concluded

you're just the man for the job, surrender or no surrender! Will you take us to camp first and dine on Army rations?"

"Never yet took nobody to my camp. I never did cotton to visitors, Son. But you—well, I shore will. Besides, there's somethin' been worryin' me of late. I been huntin' pirates' hide-ups in every bayou of the deep swamp fo' years and years, with my ol' divinin' rod, and never did I get a sign that I was clost 'til just last week. Yes, sir, I believe ol' Jean LaFitte himself has done come back to warn me!"

"Well, that's the stuff! I hope you find it. Meantime, we want to talk to you. You'll have to pole us through the canebrake one at a time, eh?"

"One at a time in my pirogue. That fat soldier will be a load!"

"Tumble in, Perkins," ordered Corporal Jimmy.

Wonderingly Jimmy and Tolliver watched the old man pole his little pirogue through the rift in the canebrake wall. It was pitch dark when he came back and took Tolliver along the trail. Jimmy sat another half hour fighting mos-

quitoes, and pondering the wisdom of his course. Still they had to camp that night some place other than this leaky skiff, and Captain Johnson must have a bit of land above the swamp muck. When he had loaded his kit into the cypress dugout and sat cross-legged in the bottom, watching the old man pole through the cane that hung over the trail on either side, he began seriously to question the swamper.

And the first thing he discovered was that Old Man Cap'n Johnson had hardly an idea what a wireless telegraph was. He had heard of it, but he was quite doubtful if there was any such contraption. As for there being anything of the sort in the deep swamp, he hooted at the idea. He had heard the shrimp seiners tell of one at Grand Isle to the westward, but Old Man Cap'n had his private opinion of such crack-brained enterprises as trying to talk to a man a thousand miles away right through the air.

Jimmy was dispirited; plainly the old swamper's simple incredulity was not of much use to the Intelligence Department. And he demurred

at coming "out front" to act as guide to the officers. He would show Jimmy all he knew, but a man might spend the summer prowling through the deep swamp and find nothing.

"Frawgs and bats and owls and 'gators," concluded Old Man Cap'n genially, "and the old pirate ha'nts—that's all the citizens we be! And here's your two soldiers and my camp, and you're welcome, boys."

Perkins and Tolliver stood dismally about a smoky little fire on a bit of firm soil that was not thirty feet square. And on this was the old man's palmetto-thatched shack, his clay furnace, his lines of rusty traps and bales of drying moss. On every side stretched the impenetrable "rozo" cane with only the pirogue trails through the jungle, upon which no man could set foot without sinking, perhaps neck deep. Certainly the Gov'ment would have had a hard time tracking Old Man Cap'n, late of the C. S. A., to his stronghold.

The boys set about making camp under the palm shack while Cap'n Johnson saw to the cooking. Then they all squatted around the fire and dined with ravenous appetites. But to all argu-

ments that the host should come out to the river posts and submit to interview with the Army officers, Old Man Cap'n was deaf. He had a dozen excuses; and Corporal Jimmy concluded finally that he had better take the responsibility of handling the scouting expedition himself. Tomorrow the old man said he would show them a trail southward to open water, but he could only take one man through.

So they rolled in their blankets under the mosquito bars. But after the Intelligence squad of Company B was safely stowed for the night, Corporal May noticed that Old Man Cap'n was again taken with the strange moods that held him now and then. He wandered to the edge of his clearing under the scrub oaks and stared over the canebrake. Jimmy heard him mutter when he returned to the camp. He squatted by his dying fire with another close study of the starlighted south. Jimmy dozed fitfully, and when he awakened for the third time and discovered that the old man still held his vigils outside the shack, he crept out and stood up behind him. The Captain was growling unintelligibly as he stared into the embers.

"If it's a warnin', why then I defy 'em! I ain't goin' to clear out of here for any old pirate ha'nts!" he muttered.

Jimmy reached to touch the old Confederate's arm. "And who's warning you, Cap'n? I noticed all the time how uneasy you were!"

The Captain had whirled like a cat. Then, recognizing Jimmy, he smiled.

"Oh, it's you, Son! I cain't sleep. Two nights now I've heard and seen something down in *Petite Cheniere* that bothers me. I don't believe in no ha'nts, Jimmy, but what does a man think of little blue lights in the top of the trees around where old Armand Pelletier's lugger was wrecked in the hurricane fourteen years ago? He come in hunting treasure and the seas drove his craft fifteen miles inland and laid it where it is today. And never a soul has been there since!"

"Lights?" said Jimmy. "Blue lights, and somebody there? Tell me!"

"Don't know a thing. I was comin' back to camp when I seen 'em first, a little crackle up above that wreck. Lasted an hour last week. Then I went down there again and listened half

a mile away almost; and if there isn't some of the old pirate folkses come back, what is it?"

Corporal Jimmy came before him and shook his shoulder: "Captain, you never told us this! Where—how far is this *cheniere?*"

"Two miles south'ard. Just a little oak knoll in the cane, with a little shaller slough winding in from the bay. The wreck is smashed among the trees, and the jungle grown all over it."

"Captain!" whispered Jimmy, "you got to get me there—tonight!"

The old man stared. "You boys fritterin' around after buried treasure, too? Thought you was huntin' telegraphs."

"All right!" retorted Jimmy. "But in we go with your pirogue! You and I! Only room for the two of us, eh? I'll put Perkins and Tolliver on guard, though. Wireless, sure as shooting!"

He wakened his two men and explained to their sleepy ears. By the time he had persuaded the old man to drag his dugout to the trail leading southward the two soldiers were out by the fire receiving Jimmy's instructions. There was nothing they could do. The fourteen-foot

pirogue would carry but two men. With Corporal May in the bow, his Springfield hugged between his knees, the old swamper poled off in the darkness. They talked in whispers, and Jimmy got the fragments of the tale. Old Man Cap'n hated to believe in ghosts; but what was the meaning of that which he had seen and heard nights in the tiny oak-grown *cheniere* in the deep cane swamp? Jimmy almost laughed aloud at the old man's simplicity. It was no use to explain to him.

Slowly the Captain poled along the twisting trail. When pools of open water came, he paddled and Jimmy worked the push pole cautiously, for his unpracticed hands might upset the craft, so ticklish was its balance. After a while the Captain stood and listened. The night wind rustled the miles of prairie cane, but suddenly the Captain raised his hand.

"Listen!"

But Jimmy heard nothing save the swamp night noises. The old man paddled on. "I'll bring you where you see 'em, and if you can explain, why you're a wiser soldier than I ever was in '63!" he muttered.

It was almost an hour before he shoved the pirogue silently around a bend in the cane wall. Staring into the starlight, he pointed. Jimmy could make out the dark outlines of a straggling grove across the water, and slowly his keen ear picked up a sound above the rustling grass. It was a faint, irregular crash, but it stirred him like a gunshot. He rose to his feet, watching the spot. And slowly again he made out a strange light playing above the tree tops, a dim will-o'-the-wisp against the starlight, but he knew! It could be nothing less than the radio-telegraphic sparks from the antennae of a hidden wireless station. He had seen them numberless times in the field and at barracks.

"Jumped 'em!" whispered Jimmy to himself. "Ghosts of all the pirates, this is great! One on the Navy, Captain! Horse on the Coast Guard, too! Took us doughboys to land 'em!"

But Old Man Captain Johnson was staring at him a bit frightened. The old fighting fellows of '63 had nothing like this. Jimmy's delight puzzled the swamp hermit more and more.

"And we can't get Perky and Tolliver," whis-

pered Corporal May, "so it's up to you and me, Captain! Now, can you worm us in closer?" And he motioned onward.

Old Man Cap'n hesitated; then he shook his hand at the mysterious isle and set his paddle into the muck with a firm dig. "For'ard!" he muttered; "I ain't no more scared than you are, Son!"

Jimmy laughed. He was pondering his duty. He ought to get back out of the swamp and report that the phantom wireless was run to earth —and that it undoubtedly was communicating unlawful intelligence to some other spot. It explained why the fellow who stole the river mine field plans had fled to the great swamp wilderness west of the Mississippi passes. Undoubtedly the nest of spies was communicating with some innocent-appearing coaster that lay off in the unfrequented waters of the Barataria coast. Since the days of Pirate LaFitte, the offshore Gulf region here lay far from the commercial trade routes, and in the summer months no one took the trouble to penetrate the inner marshes behind the sandy reefs. They couldn't have picked a better spot on the whole Gulf coast for

seclusion, as the buccaneers knew a century and more ago!

The old man had paddled close under the overhanging cane. The crash of the wireless, the gentle rhythm of a small dynamo somewhere on the old wrecked lugger, came plainly to their ears, while the faint radio sparks were now always visible. Jimmy reached a hand to steady the craft, grasping the prairie cane. He wanted to study the lay of the land and get back. It was essential to capture the outfit some way or other, and every line of retreat must be covered. He would get back and disclose the spot; that was enough glory, and the Intelligence officers could worry about the details. Delay would not be fatal. The spies would not dream they were discovered tonight. They probably knew of the superstitious fears of the few swampers who might come near the hidden islet, and trusted to that rather than to a lookout against detection.

Corporal May, with his keen relish for action, hated to go back at once. He wanted a clearer survey of how the wreck lay and how it could be approached from the other side. It would be

no easy matter to make sure of the operators, when the only ingress was these water trails.

So he motioned to the pirogue runner to glide closer to the oak clump on the bit of higher land. Jimmy now could make out the dark hulk of the wreck, the single tall mast which undoubtedly served as one pole of the antennae. A dead tree some yards away, Jimmy decided, was the other, and both gave an elevation of some fifty feet, he thought. He could see a faint glow on the wreck; they must have contrived a tiny cabin there, to shelter the installation.

"And every bit of that stuff was lugged in in hundred-pound sections!" Jimmy muttered. "Some fellows out of the many foreigners in the coast shrimp fleet devised this—and if any secret service agent of the Imperial German Government is here, he's certainly a real swamper now!"

He arose again to peer from the shadowy cane at the oak islet sixty yards away. The pirogue was teetering under his unskilled feet, and, somehow, he never knew why, the dugout began to slip away from him. Then Jimmy did what any duffer would in a pirogue, and cannot do successfully. He bent to steady himself by grasping the

gunwale. He heard Old Man Cap'n's quick warning, but too late. The needle-like craft spun treacherously and Jimmy went over the side, crashing against the dry wall of cane and down through this into the mucky water. He made enough noise for a platoon. And he heard the Captain gurgling in the water. The pirogue was upside down and the old man floundering in the water plants and mud.

Jimmy lay on his back, hanging to his rifle. The ooze came up around his shoulders and knees, and he didn't know how far he would sink if he struggled. The Captain was gasping and trying to right the pirogue. But it came up full of thin mud.

"And if you ain't done it!" whispered Old Man Cap'n, C. S. A. "There's a feller yellin', too! Ghosts, nothin'—it's a *Dutchman!*"

"Get out of here!" gasped Jimmy. "Quick!"

"Nothin' down in this yere swamp is ever done *quick!* Gotta bale this snaky canoe, and it's some trick to climb in without upsettin' ag'in!"

Jimmy groaned. He floundered over to look towards the *cheniere* across the bit of starlit water. Several things were happening. For one,

the dynamo had stopped with the motor, the flashes from the antennae also, and the dim glare of light on the dark hulk had vanished. He thought he saw a figure for a moment. Then, he did hear a voice shouting, and a murmur of others.

Old Man Captain ceased his struggles with the overturned dugout. He swam heavily to Jimmy and they lay behind the pirogue, hanging to it and with the Corporal's rifle swung over the wet bottom. Jimmy was about to yell for the wireless spies to surrender, then he thought it was somewhat ridiculous. But now he heard the splash of a paddle towards the isle. He didn't intend to be captured in mud to his neck at any rate. So, clearing his eyes of water, he took a quick aim at the dim hulk and pulled the trigger.

"Surrender!" he roared. "In the name of the United States, I call on you to surrender yourselves!"

There was silence. Again Corporal May blazed away blindly. He shoved in another clip of cartridges and bombarded the lugger hulk.

"Surrender!" whooped the old Confederate. "But how we goin' to catch 'em?" he added to

Jimmy; "and who air these crazy bats anyhow?"

"Bluff 'em!" retorted Jimmy. "Bawl 'em out, Cap!"

They heard voices beyond the oak grove now, a splash of oars and the shoving of boats of some sort. And as Jimmy raised his voice again, there came a sheet of flame from the hulk that lit all the yellow cane and the mucky water around the islet. There was a low explosion, but this was lost in the leaping fire that ran over the lugger deck. The wireless rigging above was plainly visible. Apparently the plotters had been prepared to burn their plant at a second's notice, and take to the swamp.

"Getting away!" shouted Jimmy. "Quick with this boat!"

He began blazing away past the glare of the gasoline-soaked timbers, but even in his wrath Corporal May knew he couldn't stop the escape. Even if they got to the hulk they were in no shape to fight a bunch of desperate spies. He was even surprised that the fellows did not fight back, but only a single shot answered his and that from a pistol, that went stinging into the cane above his head.

In the light of the burning lugger, Jimmy and the old swamper righted their tiny canoe, baled the slime out and then, with much trouble, wormed over the ends into it. They were shiny with swamp mud from head to foot. And for a while Corporal May sat staring at the fire. Old Man Cap'n Johnson looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"Was this yere the new-fangled way of telegraphin' that you said could work a thousand miles without any wires nor nothin'?"

"Yes, and they got away—that's what makes *me* sore! Got away and we got to chase 'em down somewhere else, and it may take a month!"

"Well," retorted Old Man Cap'n, solemnly, "I don't just believe it. Any fellows that are smart enough to talk right out through the air a thousand miles would be too smart to let an old Johnny swamper like me come sneakin' up on 'em. Least they *ought* to be!"

Corporal May of the Intelligence Department laughed blithely. "Anyhow, we broke up their game down this way! There'll be a closer patrol off the coast now, and another crimp in the German spy system. Now we've got to paddle out

of here, pick up Perkins and Tolliver and get out front to the river. There'll be a report on this that'll open somebody's eyes. The Army's ahead again, and the secret service people ain't!"

And he shook some pounds of swamp mud off his clothes, seized the dugout paddle and saluted the grinning old Confederate. He was beginning to realize that Army Intelligence work could provide a few thrills that never got into the public eye.

CHAPTER IX

ONLY A VOLUNTEER

"IN my business, Corporal, there are a good many things," continued Levee Inspector Callahan, "that don't get in the papers, peace times as well as war times, when we're watching the big river on a headrise. But I'm glad to work along with a likely lad from the regulars such as you. Some of these green country guardsmen along this patrol get in a panic if their own hat blows off a night like last night with the flood creeping inch by inch among the sandbags and the seepage getting wider in the fields behind 'em. Does look scary a bit, but your Army engineers say it's all right unless——"

"Unless——" grinned Corporal Jimmy to the grizzled inspector, "what, Mr. Callahan?"

"Unless, for instance, the leetlest mite of explosive was left in the sandbags that we've topped the soft places with, or somebody assisted

old Father Mississippi to worm bigger one of those sandboils behind the levee out in that cow pasture I showed you. I reckon the Army is teachin' you something besides shootin' and marchin', ain't it?"

"Smallest part of it!" retorted Jimmy, as he threw a leg over his motorcycle and then looked lazily along the embankment of the great bend against whose outer bank, almost brimful, surged the yellow flood of melted snow water from half of all America. On the inner side the levee sloped in greensward down to a road and beyond this road were cottage homes, orchards, hamlets and fields.

He could see patches of water among the trees of the hummocky pasture land, and the new wooden framework built about the two sandboils upon which were tamped the sandbags that pressed back the threatened blow-out from the mighty river. Upon the levee itself he saw a militiaman silhouetted, and beyond, across the Mississippi, the yellow-funneled steamers of the U. S. Army Engineers' river fleet always on the job, peace or war. In the big bend where Inspector Callahan had charge, the levee had

slipped in two places and had been "topped" and banked behind with sandbags.

"All hunky," continued old Callahan; "the crest of the rise will pass tonight, and unless we get a wallopin' wind poundin' our bags we're through with the job. Of course it looks bad to those country guard boys—if the river busted through where'd they land, with nineteen feet of water chasin' 'em?"

"What worries us," put in Jimmy, "is what'd happen to all the factories and packing plants down below. Uncle Sam needs every bit of his work going now! Maybe some crazy fanatic knows it, too, and how easy——"

"Easy, nothin'! Nobody, night or day, can get to this levee, boy, without authority. I'm not trustin' these militia guards much—this stretch of levee's been my beat for twenty years in the ticklish times. I know every leaf of grass in that cow pasture by name, son!"

Corporal Jimmy laughed as he sped away. "The old boy is touchy! Thinks the Army's not satisfied with his job. Well, with the militia and the state levee men, and now the regulars poking

in, the old Daddy of Waters ought to be safely tucked in bed!"

The miles of smooth road slipped away under his machine, and the guards on the bank looked down curiously, but he was only halted when he skinned into the Engineers' camp by the roadside. And there, Corporal May of the Intelligence Department delivered some messages of which he himself knew nothing. Nor cared, save that he had done this courier's duty on time, reported with soldierly precision to the officer in charge, and now could speed back and report to headquarters. The Intelligence Office had nothing to do particularly with the military river patrol or the Engineers either, save as its general work was exercised. Of late Corporal May had done nothing more exciting than rout out and close a few heedless amateur wireless stations, round up a loquacious, unregistered alien here and there, poke into a labor camp looking for certain wanted individuals, and make one fruitless trip with an armed squad down into Barataria to bring in a fellow whom the secret service men were sure was one of the gang whose mysterious radio outfit Jimmy had broken up the month be-

fore. However, the man wasn't. Still Corporal May was sure, as were his superiors, that somewhere in the watery wilderness between the city of New Orleans and the Mexican Gulf, were a number of wary, resourceful and unscrupulous agents of the Imperial German Government who belonged in a federal prison for a number of overt acts of war. There was not a better port in the United States for secret enemies to operate from, for the town was habitually filled with refugee Latin-Americans, busy plotters and intriguers and soldiers of fortune from the southern republics, who would dare anything for anybody's money. Corporal May had learned "a lot that didn't get in the papers," as Inspector Callahan said. But Callahan himself didn't know that Jimmy—guileless, close-mouthed and cheerful—was on special duty at the orders of special officers, and that the Army occasionally "pulled something" that the Secret Service didn't know about.

"But if I'm going to France," thought Jimmy, as he sped down the river road in the warm evening, "what good is this doing me? Why, they might chuck me into this for keeps!" And he

wanted to grumble; his regiment had been split up and sent in battalions over the country to divisional camps to form base units for the assembling new regular regiments, and he didn't know where he would land. "But all right!" he concluded. "Every fellow to his bit—that's the way wars are won! Orders as usual!"

He reached the half-mile stretch in the river bend where the weakness in the levee had developed, and where Mr. Callahan kept his experienced eye on the sandbag topping and the sandboils in the field. Jimmy had to dismount here, for the seepage water had made muddy pools of the road. He was wading along leisurely with his machine when a hail came from the levee. He saw a khaki soldier, arms at port, challenging him sternly.

"Halt! Show your pass!"

Jimmy regarded the militiaman patronizingly. "Friend, I haven't any pass. Courier from headquarters to the engineers. I came this way awhile ago going up river."

"I don't care. The other sentry had no business doing it. Now, your pass."

"But I——"

"I don't care who you are. Mebbe a regular, mebbe not. Can't cross this section without a pass—that's my orders to everybody."

Jimmy stared and scratched his head. He was too good a soldier to argue against a sentinel on duty. But he felt aggrieved. "All right then, man. Only, do you know any other road around this spot?"

"Not my business. You'll have to find one yourself."

Jimmy splashed back with his motorcycle. The guard stood watching him from the levee top. And with a mutter, Corporal May retreated a hundred yards, threw his machine over a fence, climbed after and tried to bump away towards another fence beyond the woods.

"Well, anyhow, the fellow knows his business. I'd do the same. Can't be more'n a mile around. Here's a cow trail anyway."

He was picking his path along uncertainly, a boisterous north wind making it worse. A half mile of the woods and he saw a house and a cabbage patch and the path led to this plain as could be. So Jimmy cheerfully let his motor out a bit and came down on the homestead for directions.

Then he saw a freckle-faced boy sitting on a fence staring at him. A little wooden culvert lay just ahead and Jimmy reached this just as he turned his head to greet the youngster in the cabbage field.

"Hello, kid! Where——"

And then Corporal May went headlong over the culvert and down into mud and stones and rushes. He got a fearful jolt on his neck, and for a moment the lights went out for Jimmy. When his senses came back he knew he was feeling of his vertebrae bewilderedly, and a scared small boy was pouring muddy water on his brow.

"What—just what——"

"Your fore wheel dropped into a rotten crack in that bridge. I was just about to yell when you pitched. Gee, that was a bird of a loop you took!"

Jimmy uncertainly got up. "I think so. Next time, son, you yell first!"

"Your motor bike's just naturally busted. And, say"—Jimmy caught the boy's admiring but suspicious eye sharply on him—"are you a real soldier?"

"Feel like seven pieces of one just now. Yes, son, I was. And what's your name, and how can I get out of this mess quickest?"

"My name's Wallace. William, but the kids all call me Warty. See my hands? And, say—what does the Army do for warts?"

"Depends where you got 'em!" Jimmy grinned and staggered up. He looked Warty Wallace over carefully.

"If you want to be a soldier, don't have 'em on your mind and don't have 'em on your feet. Otherwise—well, you got some warts on those paws, haven't you?"

"You s'pose they'll keep me out? I just got to get into the Army or something!"

"You aren't more than fourteen, kid, I know. You grow awhile, and get your dad's consent in about four years——"

"And the fightin' all gone!" Warty looked so woebegone that Corporal May checked his banter.

"Never mind, there'll be something more useful than fighting. Now, if you want to help the Army, I'll tell you how!"

"Just show me! I'm tired of helpin' these

levee gangs. Been carryin' water for 'em, and sleepin' in an old bunkhouse with the cook, and——"

Something in the quivering lips of William Wallace told Jimmy much.

"Warty," he said sternly, "I'll bet you ran away from somewhere and tried to join the Army!"

"Well, I sort of ran off. I sneaked on board a packet up river—it was kind of driftin' off, but I wasn't going to stay with no orphans when there was war. No, sir, when I was the oldest one there."

"And your parents," muttered Jimmy, and then stopped. It was none of his business; he only knew that Warty was disentangling his wrecked motorcycle and dragging it towards the house.

"What'll we do now, soldier man?" demanded Warty suddenly. "It's goin' to rain and blow. You can stay all night here if you want. The truck gardener got scared of the levee breakin' and pulled out, and I'm feedin' his chickens; and every family in a mile behind this levee's gone too. I'm takin' care of most four hundred

chickens, but that's no business for a soldier, is it?"

"It isn't? Why, it's right in the first line, Warty! Feeding the nation. But how come they let you stay right in the danger zone?"

"Well, bein' an orphan, and a strange kid here, there wasn't anybody to make me leave. Old Callahan chased me off twice, and the guards fired me off the levee, so I told all the Dagos that skipped that I'd watch their chickens. Maybe they'll pay me when the danger is over, or give me a job, but shucks, I want to get in the Army or Navy or something big!"

Wearily Corporal Jimmy sat down on the shady gallery of the abandoned cottage and looked first at his wrecked wheel, and then at Warty Wallace.

"Big? Kid, there isn't any one thing bigger than another when it's serving your country! It's just doing your trick and doing it best you can. That's what we hammer into the rookies! Now, me, I am expected to report tonight at seven to my commanding officer, and that's my bit. And with this smashed wheel—where's the nearest telephone?"

"About two miles down—unless the storekeeper skipped out too."

"And you're sticking on the blessed job as a volunteer right under the worst spot in the levee! Kid, you're all right. You——"

Warty's blue eyes blinked. He seemed hungry for a word of praise, and to get it from a regular soldier, and to know he had picked this soldier up half senseless out of an irrigation ditch, and was permitted to help tinker at the Army motorcycle was wonder and joy enough for one day.

But Corporal Jimmy threw the wheel aside after a bit. It was growing dark in the little vegetable garden among the trees and hedges, and a thought came to him of the nineteen feet of angry river grinding and sucking against that soaked bank of sod far above the level of the little home. Tonight was the night when the Government forecast said the crest of the flood would pass, and it was an ugly night for it, with the wind cross-ripping the fierce currents and piling them in the bend. Jimmy looked worriedly at his host in the blue worn overalls and cotton shirt.

"Warty, if I were you, I think I'd pull out.

No particular sense, after all, in taking chances, and——"

"The levee men got to stick till she breaks, ain't they?"

"Yes, but they are regular men on the job, and——"

"Well, I'm a volunteer, you see!"

"All right, then—I give up! You got the real stuff, and I'm the last man to discourage it. But I got to shag along. You show me where I can find the road below here, and I'd like to speak to Mr. Callahan also."

"All right. I'll get a lantern. The wind is boomin', ain't it? If Mr. Callahan, or any of his guards see me up near the levee they'll have fits! Shucks, I was raised on the old river up near Hannibal, so I just let her ripple! Say, the seep water's gettin' deep—bet it's gettin' soft under those topping sacks. If anything hit that old dirt bank now, wouldn't she come roaring through? Wish the guards would let me have one peep at it!"

Corporal May listened to Warty's eager voice while the boy rummaged in the dark for his lantern and coat—eager, and lonely, but all afire

to be of some use in some way in the great scheme of things—that was the way Jimmy sized him up, and he found himself exclaiming: "Why, that's the sort of kid I used to be, I do believe! Warty's all right." Then he said aloud and gruffly, for he felt a bit of authority would do the runaway good: "Come, now—attention! You be off with that lantern and find Mr. Callahan, and I'll drag this wheel. When you find the road, set your lantern down. Then, Warty!"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Inquire for some sort of a rig. Ask Callahan. Tell him it's imperative—get that?"

"Ye-es, sir! I'm off, sir!"

And scooting away through the cabbage patch with his lantern, Warty bubbled with delight. "He—he talks to me like I was a soldier! Gee, and I'm only lookin' after these Dago chickens!"

Corporal Jimmy followed leisurely. He saw the lantern bobbing among the oaks and bushes in a field beside the one where the guarded sandbags had developed and been promptly hemmed in with plank piling and sandbags to lessen the further saturation of the levee foundation. Old Callahan would be watching this spot tonight,

and chuckling at the discomfort of the military guards who had to patrol the windswept, wave-lashed bank.

No craft were allowed to move on this section of the river after dark, these troubled times, though every hour swift little patrol boats dashed along, turning their searchlights into every crevice of the great wharves and docks where wheat and mules and stores of all sorts were loading for the ports of France. But tonight fighting the river was a more important battle than even ferreting out spies, although Corporal May of the Intelligence Department knew what few others did, and that was that five attempts to smuggle explosives on the war-bound ships in the river had been made this month, and every branch of the Government surveillance was keen on the trail of the mysterious "dynamite squad."

But Jimmy now was intent on getting his disabled machine back to headquarters. He was lifting it over a brushy ditch in the thicket-lined road and had lost sight of Warty's lantern. Then suddenly the boy crashed through the bushes, gasping breathlessly.

"Mr. Callahan! I found him, sir; all knocked

out behind the levee gang shanty. The men are all away watching the bad spots, and somebody jumped Mr. Callahan, sir!"

Jimmy dropped his wheel: "Bad, Warty? Which way—quick?"

"Badly hurt, sir! Talks wobbly—says they got his coat and lantern—two of 'em, and ran!"

"Come on!" cried Jimmy. "Something doing up here!"

They reached the old levee guard as he was staggering weakly to his feet. Callahan's grizzled head was bloody; he stared at Jimmy with closing eyes. "They blackjacked me, sir! Felt 'em getting my coat and cap—the pass, boy—they—want to—to—get by the—guards—see? The levee—my old bad levee—stop 'em, boys—stop——"

And he went down in a limp heap. Jimmy jerked the old man to the door of the guard shanty, then he turned and ran for the levee two hundred yards through the soft, water-soaked wood lot. "Come on, Warty! I need you here!"

They splashed through the water, reached the high, barbed wire fence along the road, climbed it and leaped. Warty was the quicker; he was

racing up the long inside slope of the bank when a yell came from the crest.

"Halt! Halt—who goes there?"

By a desperate leap Jimmy reached and dragged the boy down.

"Warty, he'll shoot! That's orders." Then Jimmy, grabbing his excited young volunteer by the shoulders, bawled out to the sentinel, whose form he could just see against the stars above the levee crest.

"Friend—*without* the countersign! But wait, let me advance! There's trouble—somebody's on that levee now! Oh, don't you understand!" He was dashing on, and then, in the dark he heard the rattle of the guardsman's rifle.

"Halt! That don't go! Halt, or I shoot!"

"Call the guard!" roared Jimmy. "But let us go! Can't wait—that levee may smash!" He struggled on up, holding his volunteer behind him, for Jimmy was desperately afraid the rattled, inexperienced guardsman would shoot. "Call your relief!" he yelled again, "but let us go! Turn out your guard, and come with us!"

But the sentry wrathfully refused to stir. His rifle was at port; watching every move of the two,

he began to howl to the next post. But the bowling wind and the surging water behind his feet drowned his outcries.

The next sentry did not repeat the call. Again the guard shouted: "Corporal of the guard—Number Three, Relief!" But his eyes never left the huddled figures below him.

"Oh, Warty!" groaned Jimmy, "this'll never do! It'll take 'em ten minutes! Oh, that fool!"

"Cut for it!" gasped Warty. "Lemme—I'm not a soldier—yet!"

"No, you'll get shot!" Then Jimmy saw that the guard had turned his back and was bawling frantically into the gale to signal the next post.

"Run, then!" he whispered, and bending low he dashed after Warty along the slope. They had not gone thirty feet when the sharp crack of the guardsman's rifle rang out. But he was shooting into the air to indicate "dangerous emergency" and hurry out the relief squad. A few moments more and Warty slipped and fell headlong into wet, sticky clay, and then Jimmy sprawled over sunken sandbags—they were in the very breach of the threatened *crevasse*. It was the spot which Old Man Callahan always re-

served for his own vigilance, for in this same bend nine years before, the mighty Mississippi had leaped one stormy night, swept a mile of the levee out as if it had been the rim of a child's mud pie, and had gone roaring to the Gulf across country, laying everything under water for four months. Everything had been done this time on the ticklish top that could be done; it would be just luck and the absence of the final tip of a wave or the settling of a few sandbags, that would keep disaster off until the flood crest receded.

As Jimmy regained his feet and went staggering up over the sandbag barricade he wondered why there were no particular watchers right at the threatened point. Then he reflected that nothing could be done, once a *crevasse* really started, and the builders knew it. They could only fight to save the ends and lessen the disaster.

He came groping upon Warty's legs in the darkness. The boy was lying down among the bags and timber bracings peering ahead. Little trickles of water came down here and there among the bags, and the whole bank was soft under the tremendous pressure on its outer face.

"If they're goin' to do anything," whispered Warty, "it'll be here. Maybe it's *done!*"

Jimmy went creeping on up the slope, but Warty valiantly kept by his side. They heard the suck and crash of the immense eddies over the one hundred and twenty foot depth of the river, and when they neared the top the wind brought curls of spray over the sandbag reinforcement.

"There!" muttered Jimmy, "do you see anything move to your left?"

The stars seemed to press right down to the rough water surface. The further shore was invisible. Only a red light gleamed from the engineering river fleet moored a mile upstream. Not a patrol boat stirred—everything was warned against approaching the danger spots where even a steamboat's wake might start a catastrophe.

"There!" broke out Warty, pointing over Corporal May's arm—"there's a man!"

Jimmy saw something move—a man it was, just rising from a crouch over the sandbags at the further side of the sixty feet of topping.

"Got to get him," muttered Jimmy, "and it's a cinch he left some mischief in that topping!

Got to get that, too, Warty! It'll be a time fuse business, so's to give 'em time for a getaway!"

It was quick, sure reasoning, and Warty's eager mind grasped it. He wiggled at Jimmy's arm. "Now you get him when he stumbles," the boy said, and slid away in the obscurity of the sandbags.

He went on a sliding crawl down the slope. Jimmy suddenly realized Warty's game. The boy's crouching back was just a fit among the sandbags, and he was going to lie across that dynamiter's trail if it could be done. Jimmy huddled lower as the man passed twenty-five feet from him. He must have known from the guardsman's shot that trouble was up, but it was impossible to run in the dark among those slippery bags. Warty's figure could no longer be made out. And then suddenly Jimmy heard a cry; he saw the dim form of the man stagger, slip and fall.

The next instant Corporal May was on his feet, making a running leap and he came down squarely on a struggling, cursing fellow who was striking at the head of Warty Wallace, volunteer of the levee patrol, and Warty's skinny young

arms were locked tight about the enemy's ankles. Jimmy swung a sinewy fist clean under the stranger's ear. Then he suppressed a yell. All his wind and heart and muscle were in that punch for a knockout. And he got it—and a terrific twinge of pain up his arm.

"Ow!" he yelled—"Hang to him, Warty—we got him!"

Warty was rising breathlessly from the muddy sacks. "Got him? I guess we have! What hit him? He's limp as a rabbit!"

"Let him go!" shouted Jimmy. "There comes a lantern! The guards are hot-footing in at last! Up the levee, son! Fast work for that infernal machine—and if I yell, you light out—*pronto!*"

They almost collided on the levee topping as they dashed for the spot where they had seen the spy first. Struggling and searching in the seepage water they heard the hail of a hurrying guard patrol, and Jimmy answered warningly lest some excited corporal order his squad to shoot.

"I see it!" shouted Warty—"clean off the topping—in the grass—a little spark!"

"Smash it!" yelled Jimmy, and they made another blind rush together for the end of the bag

topping. He saw the spark of a fuse now, but before he could reach it Warty fell on the line of it in the levee grass, and jerked it clear of all attachment.

Then Jimmy sat down and held his stinging wrist. Warty continued to wave and thresh the broken time fuse. At the other end of the topping men were gingerly picking their way across —some were militia guardsmen, and some were state levee patrol men in civilian clothes with lanterns.

At the first rays of the light upon Corporal May's muddy khaki, the guard corporal stopped bewilderedly. He had signaled for the squad to cover anyone discovered, but Jimmy looked composedly on the gleaming rifles.

"Come on, bucky!" he said. "I'm a regular, and this mess is all over but the shouting. Down the slope of this levee you'll find one of the dynamite squad that the authorities have been hunting, and somewhere in this topping you'll find a can of nitro, or some stuff that'd start this plagued river plumb crazy if *it* had started!"

"A regular!" gasped the corporal—"Hi, de-

ploy down that bank and find that man! All along there, too, and search every yard of land to the woods! So you're the bunch that tried to run my guards, eh? Where's old Callahan?"

"Callahan's back at his shanty getting over a groggy feeling!"

And a somewhat fat-headed militiaman who had been staring at Corporal May of the regulars, now blurted in defiantly.

"Callahan ain't either! I passed him not ten minutes before these fellows came running onto my post. Old Callahan with his lantern and his inspector's badge on his cap, and——"

"Of course you did—only next time look closer, for this *wasn't* Callahan. You'll find Callahan's duds on that fellow you just arrested down the levee!"

"Got him!" yelled somebody down the bank. "Rigged out in the inspector's stuff all right. He walked right up to the guard, flashed his lantern on his badge and walked on—some nerve that!"

The levee patrol were cautiously digging among the sandbags; and they finally unearthed a cleverly simple dynamite bomb with a broken

fuse which the foreman silently showed to the state guard non-com.

"Gee," said the militia corporal finally, "and they pulled that on us, eh? And this blamed regular comes snoopin' in and breaks up the game, while you fellows stand yellin' like a bunch of parrots! And here's that kid with the warty hands that Callahan and me have chased off this forbidden ground forty times this week!"

"Warts is right," retorted Corporal May, "but if it hadn't been for him and his warts there'd have been ten feet of water in some of these west bank factories all summer. Warty, you understand? If it hadn't been for you, some of Uncle Sam's war contracts would have stopped dead. Front line work, Warty—front line of defense!"

"Say," broke out the other corporal tartly, "who is this kid, anyhow? Callahan said he didn't have no home and had sort of adopted all the hencoops back of the levee when the people skipped out."

"Tell 'em, Warty," grinned Jimmy, "for I sure am going to tell everybody—the War Department, and the Governor of this state and the

King of England, and Papa Joffre, for you sure helped all of 'em. Tell 'em."

"Well," muttered Warty, "I'm just kind of a volunteer."

They all went back with the prisoner to where Mr. Callahan was sitting before his shanty, slowly recovering from his experience. As Corporal May briefly related what had happened on the levee, the old man looked Warty Wallace over thoughtfully.

"Well, I reckon this is one on me," he muttered. "Mr. Soldier-Detective, you better take this kid with you and break him in the business. He's too smart to be hangin' around the river front these days."

"Warty is going on the unofficial list of the Army Intelligence," laughed Corporal May. "Uncle Sam needs him."

CHAPTER X

CONTRABAND OF WAR

CORPORAL JIMMY MAY was daily expecting the orders that would detach him from the Intelligence Department and assign him once more to his company to assist in the work of shaking down the rookies to fill out the regimental ranks ere they were ordered to France. Company after company had gone off quietly, sometimes on midnight notice, moving from the barracks through dark streets to train or wharf to assemble at the rendezvous, of which even the soldiers knew nothing—only that, bit by bit, they were following Pershing from Atlantic seaports to run the gauntlet of the German U-boats and strike a blow for liberty on foreign soil.

B Company was expectant and hopeful of immediate call with the regiment. Even Corporal Jimmy May, alertly disciplined and keen to every demand of the service, grew restive when he saw

himself lingering on with this special duty about the port of New Orleans. The Secret Service men and the Navy had got most of the espionage work well in hand; Corporal May had not been off on a job for a week and to sit about an office, rather stiffly buttoned up in a well-laundered service jacket with the thermometer at 94 degrees, poring over reports and answering calls for his superior officers, was getting Jimmy's "goat." He was too much an outdoor lad and had too much initiative to consider an office detail as a deserved reward.

He was idly sitting back trying to get relief from an electric fan in the stuffy office when Sergeant Bridger of the Artillery, also on "Intelligence," turned, grumbling, from the telephone and announced:

"That same kid's on the wire who was hollerin' for you yesterday and wouldn't talk to anybody, not even Major Colt himself,—he just had to see you and he didn't give a hang about anyone else in the Army."

"Kid?" muttered Jimmy. "Oh, yes! I know!"

Still he didn't. Jimmy had been on such a varied lot of experiences up and down the river,

running down unlawful wireless and identifying suspects in the dock dynamiting cases, and he had such a habit of befriending everyone, that it might be any one of a number of "kids." But when he heard a thin, quavering voice over the telephone he at once shouted back heartily:

"Why, hello, Warty! What's up now?"

He winked at Sergeant Bridger: "This is the nervy kid that helped me land that fellow who tried to blow out the river levee, you see." And then, to Warty Wallace again: "Say, son, you still on that volunteer levee patrol and having the guardsmen chase you cross-country now and then?"

"Not—not exactly." Warty spoke diffidently over the wire. "I just been doing like you asked me. Keepin' my eyes open, sir, and ears too, around the river front where I could get in. And I—I—tried to get you last Tuesday and yesterday to tell you somethin' funny I saw."

"Well, I told you to tip off anything you got to the Secret Service people—and I spoke to 'em about you, Warty, too."

"I know. And I did, Corporal, about this business and they sent two men to look into it

and they poked around and just laughed and joshed me, and I said after this I wouldn't fool with anybody but a Regular Army man like you!"

Corporal May laughed himself, but softly, so as not to offend Warty.

"That's right, kid! Stick to the doughboys! All the same, what's this that the sleuths joshed you about? More dynamite plots upriver?"

"No, sir. But I bet you I know where they're runnin' a wireless out of this district, an' the Coast Guard and the Navy ain't in it a bit."

Corporal May sat up alertly; then he replied abruptly: "Warty, you reported it as I asked you?"

"Sure I did—and got the laugh from those Gov'ment detectives. I want you to see, Corporal—only man I trust is a real Army man!"

And again Corporal May chuckled to Sergeant Bridger. "This kid is a regular kid! One of my unofficial staff that I don't even report on." Then he issued a crisp, businesslike instruction to Warty Wallace, such as he knew Warty would most admire in a Regular Army man, put down

the telephone and walked briskly into his commanding officer's presence and saluted.

"I would like, sir, to get into communication with that boy I spoke of in the dynamite case, sir. A little homeless river rat, but as keen and honest as they come, and I believe in his judgment, sir. He thinks he has something to tell us, sir."

Major Colt looked Corporal May over with a measuring eye. Corporal May had put two big cases over for the Army Intelligence; and he was not liable to be fooled.

"The Federal agents didn't just approve of this boy's idea, sir, whatever it was," continued Jimmy, "but I—well, I'd like to ask permission to see him."

"Go ahead, Corporal. Twenty-four hours—but keep in touch with this office. Orders might come at any moment sending you back to barracks and to active line duty. If there's anything further to this running of wireless apparatus out of the United States, why, of course it's a matter that the Government is particularly keen to apprehend, with the troopships already assembling. Very important, sir—very. Look into it and report."

So Corporal May went back to make an appointment with his admiring young friend, William Wallace, otherwise known as "Warty," across the river among the factory wharves and on the west bank levees.

"All right, boy! The four o'clock ferry, and don't be foolin' your Uncle Sam. These spy plots and clues have given us no end of silly chasing about for nothing at all. Remember, sir!"

"Ye-es, sir," quavered Warty, and then he retorted resolutely, "but I got something, sir—and the Coast Guard fellows and the Secret Service men they just wouldn't believe what I told 'em, sir!"

"Sounds right-o," murmured Corporal May, and hung up the receiver.

At four o'clock, on the deck of a tubby little ferry that crossed the river to a manufacturing town behind the great Mississippi levees, he met Warty Wallace. Jimmy eyed his fifteen-year-old assistant closely and then bantered him as usual: "Well, son, still trying to grow up big enough to join the Regulars, eh? Keep right on the way you're doing—except the warts."

Warty grinned sheepishly, and held up his

hands. "Worse than ever! But I don't care as long as——"

"Doing your bit," retorted Jimmy. "Now, what is it you've got for us?"

"Corporal," said Warty, solemnly, "there's a little old gas boat going down through Barataria tonight into the big swamps with something funny on board."

"That's work for the Coast Guard."

"Sure, and I told that Revenue fellow from the cutter. They sent a couple of men to search this lugger on my tip, too. And they didn't find a thing. There's a close hunt for wireless stuff that is supposed to be slipped out of this port for the use of the Germans somewhere down the Mexican coast, or in the Caribbean, isn't there?"

"Yes. There's been tips sent away about troopships and our coast patrols, undoubtedly. But this doesn't regularly belong to the Army Intelligence—we ain't no horse marines!"

Warty was ruffled. He wanted his Regular Army corporal to be all that his dreams made him; and Jimmy, who concealed much of his alertness and efficiency behind this banter when off duty, ought to be more dignified.

"Lookee here!" Warty said. "I was foolin' around this wharf over the levee where all the Barataria shrimpers come in, and some of the crew of a big converted gasoline lugger were stowin' stuff away on her. She was warped alongside a little bayou barge that was loaded with machinery for some reclamation plant down on the coast, and there were some long boxes marked for this lot that came on late the night before last. I was hangin' out on the levee, wishin' I could go join 'em down in that old pirate country, when these Manilaman shrimpers were carryin' these cases over the barge to the gas boat. I was just wonderin', Corporal, why they were doin' all this by lantern light when the whole lazy outfit had loafed there for two days, when, somehow, a pile of iron castings they had stacked on the barge broke away and came rolling down—and smashed one of the wooden cases. Knocked it clean down between the dock and the barge side, and there was a commotion. The old shrimp fleet skipper came bouncing over from his pilot house and the crew heaved and dragged away at the stuff under water, and Corporal, I got one look at the broken case."

"Well?" said Corporal May, interestedly.

"Well, if it wasn't a transmittin' outfit for a wireless, then I'll eat it. And wires and steel poles, a regular framework, too, like the little movable station I saw on the lower coast. And let me tell you something. Along comes one of the levee guards about that time, and then this gang just let that busted packin' case swing down under the dock until he had gone. I was watchin' 'em all the time. And then, after they had stowed the cases in that gas boat hold, I told the Coast Guard headquarters like you asked me. Next mornin' they searched this boat, too—and didn't discover a thing. The lugger crew just loafed and let 'em look. But they give me some black looks, though. And then the Coast Guard officers they give me the laugh. Said I was a fresh kid, Corporal. Now that stuff was there, and *then* it wasn't! And now, I put it up to the Army."

"Hum!" murmured Corporal May of the Regulars. "Perfectly right. And of course there's been a report made, and of course I can't go behind that. Not just on your word, Warty."

Warty looked injured.

"You see I'm not a brigadier general, or even head of the Army Intelligence Department," went on Jimmy soothingly. "I couldn't get my office to interfere on this without evidence, Warty."

"That's it! Evidence! That lugger is sneakin' contraband wireless out down through the deep swamp to the coast. Shallow draft, she is, and there ain't a Revenue Guard boat that could crawl into some of those bays where the old pirates of LaFitte used to hide. But if anyone knew the passes from the swamp to the Gulf, and there happened to be a smart little fishin' schooner idling off a few miles, it wouldn't be any trick at all to run stuff on board of her. No outside craft ever come close in along the Barataria coast and there ain't any guard patrol at all, Corporal!"

Corporal Jimmy looked thoughtfully at Warty. "Kid, how do you happen to know all this?"

"Oh, I just shipped down there twice on the shrimp luggers, and I figured it out. Why, that country, all swamps and shallow lakes and twistin' bayous, is just as handy for smugglin' as it

was when old Jean LaFitte and his pirates built their fort on Grande Terre Island. Now, what does this gang run a concealed wireless outfit down that way for, if——"

"Son," interposed Corporal May, curtly, "you and I are talking too much for Regulars! We'll give this crowd a looking over. Maybe the Army will have another laugh over the Coast Guard and the Harbor Patrol."

Dim lights were blinking out on the shabby little wharf in the narrow canal that led away from the levee of the mighty Mississippi to the cypress swamps of the south coast when Warty Wallace led Corporal May of the Regulars to the spot.

Sitting on a lumber pile above the gasoline lugger, his service uniform concealed by the shadows, Jimmy watched the indolent Manilaman crew loaf away the hot evening apparently awaiting the skipper. She was an ordinary, beamy seaworthy lugger, her mast taken out and propelled by a slow speed motor. Dozens like her came up from the watery wilderness south of New Orleans each week with oysters, shrimp, fish and game, and went off again unnoted. Not a

thing unusual, not even the little rough barge moored alongside with the tarpaulin-covered cargo.

"The Coast Guard fellows looked her all over," commented Warty, "but I saw that wireless stuff, and I know it. When the search was on, these Baratarians just grinned, not even surprised at it. Now, I been watchin' pretty close and that damaged packin' case was never taken off. It was just concealed so cleverly that the officers never suspected, and the crew knew they never would suspect."

"Warty," murmured Corporal Jimmy, "we've got to be cleverer, haven't we? Now, I can't go poking on board in uniform, nor can I take it off. It's just up to you, son."

"I'd like to sneak under the deck of that barge fore and aft," said Warty. "It'll be an awful dirty hole, though. It's the only place the officers didn't really look. But if you crawled down those little hatches Uncle Sam wouldn't know you when you got out."

Corporal May did look dubiously at the small deck spaces on either end of the cargo hold. "Well, you for it, Warty. Those fellows are

loafing around their galley on the other side of the gas boat cabin. It's your chance."

He saw Warty slip away down the levee side, cross the rickety wharf, crouch by the tarpaulin covers and then swing down the hatch. He admired Warty's persistence and loyalty; and ever since he had enlisted the aid of this river waif in frustrating the plot to dynamite the levees, he had trusted the boy's judgment and cool head.

"But he ought to crawl out," mused Jimmy, "and—there comes the skipper of this swamp junk, stopping to light his pipe right on the barge deck, too!"

It was true enough. A swarthy-faced pilot, after a glance over his craft, was bawling out orders to his motley crew. Men came around the gasoline boat's cabin responding shiftlessly, and began to cast off the lines.

"The beggar's pulling out," muttered Jimmy, "and the kid on board! That'll never do."

The heavy motor was banging away and the fellows went forward on the lugger to tighten the warpings to the barge. The space was widening between this and the dock, when Corporal Jimmy, giving a keen glance around, swung off

in the shadows, leaped the space lightly and crouched down by the tarpaulin-covered machinery. Another instant he was unde this, crawling around where he could whisper but vainly in the direction of the hatch.

"Warty, you fool! Get out of this—they'll be off with us!"

A grimy, freckled face just peeped below the hatch combing. "Gee! I think I know something!" gasped Warty. "There ain't a thing down here except tar and bilge water, but I got an idea, Corporal!"

"We got to jump for that bank somewhere," whispered Jimmy. "No, there she's passing it. Too late! Say, kid, what did I say about this? It's not fit work for the Army—it's a job for the horse marines!"

"We can get ashore somewhere down the canal, but first I got to prove something."

"Lay low—there come a couple of 'em."

Jimmy stretched out under the tarpaulin alongside the machinery. And the two shrimpers squatted right down by the open hatch on the deck under which the volunteer assistant to the Regular Army Intelligence Department was

concealed. Not ten feet away, equally well hidden, was Corporal May of B Company. And Corporal May was getting hotter every minute.

Jimmy took a glance out presently. "Fine, now! Nothing but cypress and palmetto jungle, and a man couldn't walk a rod in that muck. Now, we just got to stick to the job. But, Warty, if this is a false lead, never again for you!" Jimmy told himself.

He couldn't communicate with Warty as long as the two lanky Manilamen jabbered out there on the deck. He caught glimpses of a charcoal pot burning on the after-deck of the lugger, and hoped presently the fellows would go to supper. The swift, semi-tropic night fell darker as the *Good Child* chugged into the watery forest aisles, and Jimmy knew they would be in a totally uninhabited region in half an hour, and it was seventy miles to the lonely south coast, with no means of communicating with the river towns save by these same irregular swamp boats.

Finally the two fellows jumped across to the gas boat's deck and went aft to supper. Jimmy promptly crawled forward, reached the hatch and dropped down into absolute darkness.

"Warty!" he gasped, "where the dickens——"

He saw the gleam of a match under the low deck beams now, and then Warty's shining eyes as he examined what appeared to be a knotted rope end protruding through a bored hole in the side planking of the barge. Ten feet or so abaft of this curious contrivance was another rope end warped clumsily around a spike and running out through a hole. At times, as the barge heaved slowly with the thrust of the boat's propeller, the water surged up and in these holes but the lines remained taut, as if attached to the lugger's side at or about the water line.

Corporal May came crawling to Warty's perch as the boy struck another match in the dense gloom.

"Pretty fine!" burst out Warty. "You see why the Coast Guards could inspect every foot of these two old buckets and not find hide or hair of what I told 'em, don't you?"

Jimmy still was puzzled: "To tell the truth—as a seafaring soldier, I am a good deal of a dub, Warty. No, sir, I don't!"

"Why, these fellows are keelhaulin' their contraband stuff right down under water cradled be-

tween the barge and the boat! If we could get a look at the lugger under her gunnel we'd see the same rig! They knew they were bein' watched, Corporal, and would be searched before they got away, so they just *cached* it under water. Fifty miles down in the deep swamp they'll drop this barge and go on to deliver their goods on the coast—and there ain't a patrol along there for fifty miles, for there ain't a place a boat can slip in except Grande Terre Pass right where the old pirates had their hiding place, and the shoals there are pretty bad, too."

"Warty," rejoined Corporal Jimmy in the dark, "the Army, represented by you and me, is putting to sea already. I've got an automatic service revolver along which may help some. We've just got to sit here and wait for something to turn up tonight, eh?"

"Yes, sir—seein' we couldn't get off if we wanted to."

"Got to grab that stuff for evidence, Warty —and arrest these fellows—the two of us. If they ever broke for the deep swamp we'd never get 'em again. I had two experiences in the cypress jungles with Old Man Cap'n Johnson

after spies and I know what it is. This must be part of the same gang."

"I'll bet they're getting some big money for takin' the chance."

"And if there's any German submarine base in the Gulf, or any stray raider, why a little wireless plant down the Mexican coast might put our whole Army Transport Service to France in danger. This isn't the first time, either!"

"Listen!" whispered Warty. "They're walking right over our heads!"

Above the swish of the water alongside, they heard the shuffle of feet. And then, with an exclamation of alarm, Warty crouched up against the deck beams.

"They're shifting that machinery! Something is over the hatch."

They heard the jar and bang of heavy castings forward. Crawling forward, Jimmy saw the gleam of a lantern above the hatch, and the rough iron frames being shoved over their only means of exit. At the same time came the smart lap of water under the square stem of the barge. Whether the crew knew of the prisoners or not was a question, but Jimmy thought they were

merely moving their cargo as the tow was encountering the rougher water of some lake.

"That's it," muttered Warty. "They're hitting big water and gettin' out of the bayous. Say, we can't let 'em seal us up in here."

The crew went on shifting the stuff. The growl of the waves increased, for apparently a smart little sea was running. The barge creaked and heaved alongside the towboat, and the bilge water splashed about the feet of Warty Wallace and Corporal May of the Regulars in the pitch darkness.

"We'll make a break for it pretty soon," growled Jimmy. "This is plenty for one night! They're jumping across now, to the gas lugger."

He crouched under the ironwork across the hatch and heaved up on it. Some of the castings moved. Again Jimmy twisted and shoved at the obstructions. And then—crash! A heavier sea smote the square end of the barge and broke over the hatch in a cold water bath. The towboat bumped and crowded against the barge, and Corporal May and Warty, dripping and dirty, struggled to shove aside the castings. Finally Warty squirmed through the opening. Then on the wet

little foredeck he pushed and lifted the burdens until Jimmy could get head and shoulders through. The crew had gone back to shelter on the lugger.

"If we're goin' to do anything," whispered Warty, "now's the chance!" He crawled to look down between the lumbering barge and the plunging boat.

Now and then in the smother of white water, he caught glimpses of the rope cradle which secured the contraband boxes under the sheering side of the lugger. There was no doubt now of the stratagem, Warty eagerly thought; but the thing was to secure the stuff and capture the plotters, too, if possible. So he crawled back, wet with spray, to whisper to Jimmy.

"Say, if this sea keeps roughenin' those boxes will be smashed sure! I reckon they're going to unship 'em pretty soon, if they can. I heard 'em talkin' up in the pilot house. We could cut the moorin' lines and drift off, and then bluff 'em with your gun, Corporal."

"But that wouldn't round up the gang," retorted Jimmy. "And we came to fetch them in along with the plunder."

The door to the pilot house suddenly opened, and a man swung out to shout astern at the crew. The two fugitives crouched by the wet tarpaulin on the barge.

"Around to the other side," whispered Jimmy, "Something's up!"

They gained the shelter of the outer side of the barge just as three men came slowly over from the gasoline boat. Warty's guess was right; the skipper was uneasy for his precious, hidden cargo in the pounding seas between the two craft. He stood in the pilot house door and yelled directions, and the men began to loosen the moorings.

"Swinging the barge astern," said Jimmy. "Then they'll hoist up their little find. Warty! Say, here's our chance—when the gang is split up. Sneak around the stern and make the other boat. We want that skipper first. The barge men can't bother much."

In the dark they crept across easily. The fellow at the stern moorings was not ten feet away. He even looked up as Warty disappeared around the engine house astern, but apparently thought it was one of their own gang. Warty and Jimmy

crept forward on the weather side along the narrow running deck. A glimpse in the engine room showed the man in charge looking out the other side at the deck hands. The pilot, also, with one hand to his wheel, was looking down to where the men were hauling the well-roped boxes aboard. Two others were warping the barge lines aft.

"Warty," whispered Corporal May, swinging his service revolver out of the holster, "there's no one on this boat except the skipper and engineer. But those three fellows will jump back before the barge goes clean astern. There's an axe by the engine house. Now, we'll rush back, I'll cover them with the gun, and you swing that axe down on the tow line. Then we'll settle for the fellows on this boat."

"All right!" Warty was creeping astern. They felt the barge give a last heavy crash against the gasoline boat's stern quarter. Then Warty dashed boldly out swinging the axe. One man stood watching the two on the barge. Jimmy was by his side, the pistol at his ear as Warty raised the axe and brought it down on the taut hawser. The deck man even then didn't realize the game. He did not see Corporal May at all,

Jimmy was by his side, the pistol at his ear, as Warty raised the axe.

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but at the second blow Warty made at the line, cutting it neatly, the man yelled and plunged at him. And Corporal May, shifting his gun swiftly, laid the plotter sprawling on the deck with a blow from the butt of it across the neck. The two men on the barge yelled bewilderedly. But the towboat, freed of its burden, leaped on, and in a moment the space had widened so that they dared not jump. At the same time, Jimmy heard the engine bell ringing violently. The pilot must have seen the tow-line part. The heavy motor began to reverse and the boat sheered around in the seas.

Silently Corporal May ran forward, leaping to the low cabin top and then around the pilot house. He discovered a swearing skipper pulling his wheel hard over, and jerking his engine bell again. He supposed that his crew had bungled the stern lines and lost the tow, but when he suddenly faced a dripping and breathless soldier who thrust a blue automatic revolver under his nose, he knew better.

"Drop that wheel!" roared Jimmy. "Hands up, and follow me back! No foolishness, now! Hands up! Watch him, Warty! Let that wheel go!"

"Juan!" yelled the skipper, *"Juan!"* But his hands went up and he stepped out to follow Corporal May who was backing along the narrow deck. Warty followed the pilot, shouting threats in his ear. The fellow couldn't tell that the lad was armed with nothing more than a short axe; it was the olive cloth and the service gun of the soldier ahead that kept his eyes glued forward. And when Jimmy reached the side door to the engine house, he kicked it and yelled again. The motor engineer, standing with his hands to the reverse lever, awaiting another bell, reached to open it. A shower of spray across the narrow deck, and then a brown hand clutching a pistol greeted his startled eyes.

"Hands up!" yelled Jimmy. "Quitting time for you!" Then he shifted his gun to the skipper: "Tumble in with him. Warty, you go down and look for any weapons on 'em or in this engine room. We'll run this ship now—first class infantry horse marines! There comes that fellow I hit—crawling forward, groggy as can be. No fight in him at all. But watch these two fellows!"

"You fools!" growled the skipper. "This boat

can't run wild—she'll pile herself ashore!"

"Not right away. Hands up, there! Faces to that wall, and be still. Go through 'em, Warty."

"Not a thing," grinned Warty, "except a pocket knife."

"Confiscate it. Here——" he turned to the deck man who stumbled helplessly forward. "Climb down in there, and line up."

The swarthy-faced boatman did so. He and the engineer were both apparently of the mixed Mexican-Filipino breed, of which there are many in the shrimp fishing camps of the little frequented reefs around the Mississippi passes. The pilot was a bronzed, fair-skinned sort.

"German, or I'm mistaken," said Jimmy. "One of the fellows who were on the interned ships that have been lying in the river for two years and more!"

"It makes no difference who I am," growled the skipper. "But you're going to wreck this boat, my friend."

"Not for your precious neck! I've got a little steersman right with me—soldier and sailor, too, unofficially! Warty, you go head this boat up

in the wind! No sailing directions, except keep away from that barge!"

"I guess so! We'll just have to wait for daylight, Corporal, and be picked up."

"You better let us go forward and heave that anchor," roared the skipper. "She'll pound her bottom out on some sand reef hereabouts."

"You stay right here against that wall," retorted Jimmy, "all three of you! The horse marines are in charge."

"Say, my friend," blurted the captain presently, staring at Jimmy's uniform, "did you drop from an aeroplane, or board us from a U-boat?"

"Never mind! Line up! Eyes on that wall. You'll get tired, but afterwards, in the federal penitentiary, you'll get a long rest."

The three muttered uneasily, turning their backs to the man across the engine room, who held the automatic with such careless ease. Off in the starlight Jimmy heard, just once, a frenzied shout; and that was the last of the barge men until they were picked up the following morning marooned on a sand spit of Barataria Bay. Down in the engine room Corporal May released

one of his prisoners long enough to put the motor under slow speed, and with just steerage way to hold the craft against wind and tide. Warty held the wheel. Now and then he came back to exult with Jimmy.

"Got the stuff," he sung out, when the first dawn appeared. "I pried one of the cases apart, and it's sure a wireless telegrapher's outfit."

"The Secret Service will be cheered to hear of it," commented Jimmy. "Second time the Army has put one over on 'em, boy!"

"And there," announced Warty, climbing up weary-eyed and wet to the cabin top, "is an oyster boat heading up the bay for New Orleans. I know a lot of those fellows and they're good Americans."

Warty stood up and waved the flimsy cotton flag that he found in the pilot house until the astonished oysterman came alongside. Then he explained, while Corporal Jimmy asked the loan of a steersman and engineer to take the *Good Child* back to the river. And a stout and brawny trio of Barataria boatmen watched the dejected prisoners until they were turned over to the Federal agents of justice.

Then Corporal May and his weary young volunteer turned away to seek much needed rest, Jimmy down to his company barracks below the city, and Warty Wallace across the river to his "hangout" with the levee guards.

"Son," said Corporal Jimmy, "you did some bully work this trip. I'll see that you get some recognition of it, too, before I go."

"Go?" repeated Warty, anxiously, "Over across you mean?"

"Ordered to report to my company again," answered Jimmy, "so maybe it's France this time!"

Warty's face fell. He had come to feel that he belonged, somehow, to the United States Army, and to B Company in particular. Then he looked stubbornly at Corporal May.

"All right! You'd be surprised to see me over there, too, wouldn't you?"

"Sure would! And I guess you'd find stowing away on an Army transport harder work than beating a river packet, Warty!"

"Watch me," retorted Warty. "You might see me on the bank waving the old flag when your old troopship sails in!"

CHAPTER XI

"SOMEWHERE IN PANTS"

DOWN a narrow, huge-cobbled street in the shadows of the ancient balconies of New Orleans' French Quarter, swung a dim long column of marching soldiers in heavy order, blankets and accouterments snugged up to the web belts, and the stocky, wicked-looking Springfield rifles at an easy "right shoulder" as each Regular of B Company strode on.

A big, August moon hung over the great crescent of the Mississippi beyond the line of darkened, corrugated docks, and it was not until the front files had come out on the stone-paved levee and caught a glimpse of the glittering water that Sergeant Milbank, hardened veteran that he was, gave a gasp and almost voiced his incredulity aloud.

Then he swung back and gripped the shoulder of Corporal May, once fresh-faced Rookie of the Mexican Border, and now dutifully back and,

at present, file closer after his eventful weeks with the Intelligence Department of the Army.

"Jimmy!" whispered Milbank, "Texas? Not on yer life! This means——"

"Steady," grunted Corporal Jimmy to his superior. "And weren't you wise at all? Did you think they would slate our gang back to the border?"

Sergeant Milbank was staring transfixed at the black funnel of a black ship that was pouring smoke above the line of docks. Already the head of the column was swinging into a high-fenced area where a single electric light showed a guard detail silently watching the regiment pour through. Even now, only a man here and there of the force, turned out of barracks ostensibly to board an after-midnight train for Fort Sam Houston, the Southwestern departmental headquarters, had awakened to the significance of his whereabouts.

"Jimmy," whispered Milbank, again, "you knew it, you dog! Inside stuff, hey? Orders was Texas, and here the gang is headin' 'somewhere in France'!"

Jimmy was bursting with pride and exultance.

Of all B Company, he alone of the rankers had known for six hours that this night, quietly and after midnight, the regiment would take ship for the torpedo-haunted waters on their way to the great war. From his position with the Intelligence Department and because special trust and confidence were ever reposed in Corporal Jimmy, and Corporal Jimmy had never fallen down on a detail, nor uttered an indiscreet word in his career, he had become aware of the great news.

When the column had halted inside the barbed, wire-crested fence and along the iron piers of the dock sheds and had rattled their arms down on the stones, there came an involuntary start, a murmur and a craning of necks. Under the sheds they saw the piled impedimenta of the regiment, with details working up the narrow gangways to the ship's rail, and all the space within the area was a hum of busy, orderly confusion—officers, stevedores, trucks and escort wagons. The sleepiest and dullest man in all the regiment was quivering joyously now. This was the game, was it? Uncle Sam, instead of entraining 'em for the Texas posts, which had made every man of 'em wild with subdued wrath and unable to

credit it, had sent the outfit straight from barracks to troopship without even bothering a mother's son of 'em with as much as a chance to say farewell to sweetheart or family.

"And it's all right, too!" chuckled Jimmy. "Whose business is it, anyhow? I figured the next bunch would be sent from some other port rather than the Atlantic Coast. Don't have too many eggs in one basket, eh? Well, here we are, Private Perkins, and I hope a sea trip takes some of the fat off you better than chasing Villa did."

Fat Perky leaned on his rifle perspiringly at ease. Already the column head was forming by twos and ascending the narrow gangways. A subdued cheer started from the first ones and then was hushed. The surprise of it, the quiet and the beautiful night, along with this fulfillment of the regiment's fondest dreams laid its spell on the very souls of them.

"Ready, now," grunted Milbank. "That battalion next. Good-by, you old bully U. S. A., when we lift the last foot off them cobbles. Somewhere in——"

"Somewhere in pants," murmured Private

Perkins. "That's where I'll be, I still trust, when the daisies nest again——"

"Attention!" snapped Sergeant Milbank. "Corporal May, look to your men on that shaky bridge; and there comes the adjutant. Now, what?"

A quiet officer approached, received Corporal May's salute and spoke briefly: "Fall out, sir. You are to report again, at once, to Captain Doyle for special duty."

And Corporal May, as the officer went on down the column, stood there, the most chagrined non-com in all the regiment. Special duty again! Was it possible, after all, that, in some manner, he was to be detained from the over-sea expedition? Here, up the gangway to the troopship's main deck, the fellows were already pouring to bump and crowd down to the unaccustomed narrow quarters, their hearts singing with the joy of it all; while he, Corporal May, just because he had been more efficient, alert and valuable to his country in the Intelligence work, might be kept out of the first-line trenches! It was maddening! He snapped up his rifle, ground his teeth and turned on his heel, conscious that

a mutter of surprise and almost pity had come from the now moving column disappearing under the dock doorway.

But he went straight in search of his superior of yesterday, after a report to his company commander. Captain Doyle of the Army Intelligence was found at the transport guard quarters murmuring something to the commandant. He returned Jimmy's salute and then indicated with a gesture that the latter was to pass out through the gate.

And then poor Jimmy forgot all discipline and the proper position of a soldier for an instant. He blurted out his dismay ere the superior officer could speak:

"Yes, sir! But it doesn't mean, sir, that I—I—ain't going, sir!"

Captain Doyle gave him a faint, grave smile. "You are to take your place, sir, in that automobile, and await orders." And then, with a salute to the commander of the guard, he turned and followed Jimmy rapidly out across the broad, cobbled levee to where a huge Army motor car stood. Another non-com was with the driver, but not a fellow of Jimmy's regiment. Captain

Doyle had nothing to do with the transport business; plainly Jimmy was going to be the lone goat of this midnight, last-minute affair, whatever it was. He climbed in, shut the tonneau door, gripped his rifle between his knees, folded his arms and savagely tried to forget himself, the Army, the smoky funnel of the troopship over the dock, and everything else in his heart-sickness. But they certainly couldn't and wouldn't leave him behind with no more ceremony than this! Why they needed him! B Company, the burned, lean-faced, cheerful, rollicksome fellows, veteran and trained Regulars all; the Regiment with its unwieldy intake of recruits; the Colonel, the Army, Black Jack Pershing over there—why, they all needed him, he was convinced; and if that unnamed, mysterious troopship sailed tonight without him, why, Jimmy would go jump off the barracks levee into the Mississippi!

Captain Doyle did not speak until the great motor car had straightened out with a mighty roar on the road to Jackson barracks.

"I suppose, young man, you take this hard!"

"I—I—, sir, it would break me worse than doing time at Leavenworth!"

The officer was looking away when Jimmy turned his own strained eyes upon him. And Jimmy turned back just in time to note that the car had gone leaping past the ancient, whitewashed barracks on down into the moonlit countryside along the east bank of the Mississippi. Mile after mile of good road, indifferent road, bad road the car ate up without pause or apparent purpose, and Corporal May began to get a new feeling of surprise. What was it all about? The Intelligence officer was fifty miles or so down the great river and ahead of the troopship back in the crescent bend of the city docks. They had passed the long line of interned, and now seized, German and Austrian merchantmen swinging at their moorings amidstream as they had been for three years; and now the Army car must be nearing the ancient forts that spanned the lower river with their guns. Then it was slowing by a little river landing over the green levee, and Captain Doyle and his silent Corporal got out and went over to the piling against which a little curtained launch bumped in the heavy currents.

Jimmy noted that some of the Coast Artillerymen were in this, and the lieutenant in charge conferred quietly with his superior officer. Then the launch sped around and was flying off down the moonlit river, the fastest thing that Corporal May had ever hit on water. Everybody seemed unconcerned enough. It was maddening to Jimmy; these fellows, officers and men, weren't going anyway—*they* hadn't walked up and into the gateway of the world war, as it were, and then been suddenly pulled back as he had been!

He wanted to growl and rebel and do everything, but no one gave him even an explanation. The Coast Guard chap, or Naval Reserve fellow, whoever it was steering the launch, gave him only an enigmatic clue.

"There was a man's size local cyclone went over the passes this afternoon and something busted," he murmured, and Jimmy then remembered that there had been some sort of a storm somewhere.

"Oh, forget it!" he growled, and glared at the artillerymen. "Storm? Just suppose you——" then he quit. What was the use?

So he listened to the swish of the water along the launch's side, and caught glimpses of the shadowy marsh shore off to the left. And presently they flew past a low buoy tugging in the stream, and then sped off to the right and came down upon the dim lights of a small tugboat. A hail came from the deck, and the launch went alongside. The two officers climbed over the rail, and then Jimmy found a chance to demand explanation of the artillerymen.

"She's huntin' her old fool mines, like a hen for her chicks after a rain," muttered the C. A. C. corporal. "We planted 'em last spring when there was talk of submarines in the Gulf, and this little hurricane brought a big uptide against the current of the little old Mississippi, and a cross gale, and some of them mines just pulled their anchors and heaved off downstream."

A deck man spoke from the tug stern: "All cleaned up now, except one, Number Thirty-eight, a big, contact buoy, and I guess she's drifted clean out to sea by now. Not just a pleasant neighbor at that, though."

The Coast Artillery, as represented by Cor-

poral Jensen, wiped its brow with relief. "Then I guess we're through. It isn't exactly our business anyhow."

"Well," grunted Corporal May of the Intelligence, "I don't just see what they pulled me off my ship for. Your blamed old mine can go clean to Yucatan for all I care. I want to make that old trooper. I've just got to board her, and how'll I ever get back if she sails before daylight?"

The officers were parting with a nonchalant end to the discussion. Captain Doyle came swinging back to the launch. "It's all right, Corporal, as far as we're concerned. The transport was held up for some hours on account of the uncertainty as to the mines. That's all, sir, except that the two wireless stations down here are both out of business, and certain communications had to be made to the transport here at the river's mouth."

"Yes, sir," blurted Jimmy; "but me, sir—she's coming on, sir, and I'm not with her!"

Captain Doyle smiled again. "I was wondering how you'd take it, Corporal. You have been highly valuable to our office the past six weeks,

but—well, you are going to France, sir, as you wish."

Jimmy tumbled to attention as best he could under the low launch awning. "Me? Thank you, sir! But how, with the trooper sailing?"

"The transport will stop some miles down off Pilot Town to let off the river pilot who brings her this far. This launch will then put you on board with the confidential last reports, which are to be handed the ship's officers. You were selected, sir, for extraordinary confidence because you deserved it, sir."

But Jimmy was not in a mood to be handed bouquets. He was almost whooping his joy, and even when Captain Doyle, with a friendly laugh and a handshake, handed him a packet of sealed orders over the tug's gunwale he almost forgot to salute. Then there was an order and the white launch, with the C. A. C. corporal in charge, whirled off on the fierce currents of the Mississippi.

"Let 'er go!" whooped Jimmy. "All to the candy, now—but don't you fellows fall down on making that pilot exchange place. There'd be plain murder here, I tell you!"

The artilleryman grunted enviously. "Don't get so fresh, kid. You ain't the whole expeditionary force. You look new as paint to me to be goin' along at all."

Corporal Jimmy was too happy to rag the other non-com in turn. He crouched over the side, staring at the shoreless waters in the dim light. The launch man couldn't make it too speedy for him. Every now and then he looked anxiously back, fearing the side lights of that transport would loom up in the land haze. He knew that the port was closed at night and none other than a Government vessel would be stirring. The launch was rising and pitching in a long swell up the river from the passes, and the darkness, now that the moon was setting just before dawn, was growing deeper. The steersman finally turned and cautioned the motor engineer to reduce the speed.

"We can't pick up a mark in this stuff, and besides, there's a lot of drift running." Then he jumped forward to seize the wheel more firmly: "Wreckage from that gale! Back her—full speed!"

Then something happened so startlingly sud-

den that the two corporals lolling on the back cushions of the launch never could relate it clearly. The bow of the launch rose with a crash upon an object that heaved up from the muddy waters, made a frantic side twist, struck the surface on its side—and Corporal May felt himself hurled against the wet canvas top, then down, with the water boiling over him and bits of driftwood branches jabbing him in the back. Breathlessly he struck out, diving and swimming to get free. More driftage was rising from the eddies about him and he breasted the current upstream to avoid it. He heard one solitary yell somewhere below, then the voice of the steersman bawling off in the dark.

"Hang to her! She'll float—air-tight compartments, man. Climb on!"

Then there were more excited shouts and discussions. They were growing fainter, when he heard a new yell. "All here, except that Intelligence orderly! Oh, Corporal!"

Jimmy spat the water from his mouth and tried to yell. But he had to fight more dirty debris floating over him and when he was clear of this and able to respond, he heard no answer.

He was swimming downstream now, realizing that the swamped launch was being hurried on with the current. But a few moments of this, wearing his soaked and heavy shirt and the belt which bore his automatic pistol, told him that this would never do.

"Never, never do!" gasped Jimmy. "Those dubs will never pick me up! And the sealed orders—and the old trooper coming down—off for France! No, I just *got* to get out of here!"

He couldn't even kick out of his heavy army shoes, because of the tight leggins; he couldn't husk his flannel shirt because within it were the unknown orders to the transport officers. In a minute Jimmy was doing the highly dangerous thing of swimming confusedly around in a circle, uncertain which way to strike, and then he knew his strength was going rapidly. A deep eddy sucked him in once and he fought through it to discover the same old driftage that had wrecked the launch. The limb of a huge tree bobbed half under water and to this Jimmy struggled, got a leg over and lay panting while he strained his eyes against the blur over the snaky, yellow waters. Of the launch and the fellows clinging

to it, not a sight nor sound. Absolute silence save for the suck of the immensely deep Mississippi pouring out through the passes to the Gulf.

Jimmy drew himself up on the log, felt for his precious packet, rubbed the water from his hair, and pondered.

"Now, I ain't going to drown, or be swept to sea," he argued soberly. "Those fellows are all right, and when daylight comes they'll be picked up around Pilot Town or somewhere. And they know I've got the dispatches, and that old troop bucket's got to have 'em, I guess, so they're bound to look me up."

So Corporal May wiped the slime out of his ears with an important feeling that it would be worth while for the whole patrol fleet to scour the passes for him, and this certainly would be done. Those sealed orders ought to fetch 'em, if they really were important. He hadn't meant to start for France astride an ancient sycamore log that might have come out of some farmer's wood lot two thousand miles up the Ohio or the Missouri, in the heart of his beloved country, but still, he reflected, this was better than nothing.

Gazing about, he became aware of a curious thing presently. Bits of driftage all about were going by him, much faster than this slimy old tree on which he was perched. And there was a yawning, tugging twist to it, now and then, as though it were dragging deep under water. Some of the surface debris that had hung over a broken limb slipped off in a surge of the tide, and Jimmy saw that, compared with this, his impromptu craft hardly moved at all.

He struggled forward to discover, in the dim light, what was holding his tree. It certainly must be moving, for there were one hundred and twenty-five feet, maybe more, of silty water under him. Then his knee struck something under water alongside the log. He reached to feel of this and ran his hand dubiously along a round, iron bar. Presently he found a sort of elbow in this, with some smaller rod projecting lower.

"What's this?" mused Jimmy, and he lay over, swung from his log and felt below. His feet encountered a smooth, convex iron surface studded with bolt heads along a seam, apparently. He felt around this thing carefully, then he clam-

bered up on his log, whistled and suppressed a whoop of amazement.

"It's that lost contact mine! Sure as shootin' fish in a bucket!"

He sat staring at the inch tip of a trigger that now and then arose above the surface. He had never seen a harbor defense mine in his life, but hazily he knew what they were like. Some of them were electrically operated from the shore defenses; and some were moored by anchors so that a degree of buoyancy in the steel cylinder that contained the deadly charge held it just under the surface where the hull of a passing ship would strike the projecting triggers. Of course the river mouth was mined, and the pilots alone knew where the safe course was; but here was one of the contacts dragging along with this storm driftage, hidden, unknown, fairly in the path of the ships that ascended to the port of New Orleans, a hundred miles upriver, and of the craft that came down to put to sea!

"Jiminy!" whispered Corporal May. "I wonder how much of a bump it takes to send that old barrel off? Supposin' it sort of creaked around where my log hit one of those triggers? Sup-

pose we meet up with some other obstruction drifting down ten feet under water? Wow! 'And supposin' "—and then Jimmy sat straighter, staring into the mists: "Supposin'—why, there isn't any supposing about this! That big trooper's going to come boiling down here with fourteen hundred soldiers aboard and she'll never haul up till she gets to where the bar and river pilot boat changes steersmen for her, and they take her clean out of South Pass! She's coming now—been coming along all night, and the artillery people said the wireless was down and they didn't know then that one of the mines hadn't been accounted for! They'd never send the troopship out till they'd scouted out this loose, under-water demon! But she's coming!—the *boys are coming!* Say, if this thing happened, it'd be worse than submarines—just plumb, dizzy foolishness, and the Army and Navy and everybody'd be disgraced!"

That was what he thought of, even beyond the loss of life if the transport was lost—the eternal disgrace of crashing one of the best infantry regiments in the service upon one of our own harbor defenses. Perhaps, of course, the troopship

might not hit the mine, but Jimmy knew that the launch had been following the specified course for all traffic down the river past the mine fields, and here was this treacherous demon hidden and sogging slowly along with the sunken drift.

"They can't even see it—why, a hundred yards or so away, they could hardly see me in this haze. And daylight's coming! Only it seems to be worse than ever!"

He knew it must be near dawn. Once a great siren sounded off to his left, and Jimmy started. But this was far below in the haze. He could see a quarter of a mile upstream now and then, and then the curling mists drifted across. Above his head the light was coming. That made it worse. From the bridge of a vessel the lookouts could see everything save directly on the water's surface, and this they could disregard, for any small craft would have to keep out of the big ship's path.

Jimmy got an appalling sense of what might happen. "Regular frame-up for destruction," he groaned. "And me? Like a fly on a dynamite keg—that's my chance. But it ain't *me*—it's the regiment I got to think of!"

He was shivering with nervousness and the water, and, balancing himself, peered in every direction. Not a sign of bank, of boat or river mark. Nothing but the smooth, sucking eddies of the immense Mississippi sliding on under the thin, brown drifts of haze, while all above him now he saw the misty light of a clear morning arising.

He had no more idea of his whereabouts than a cat in a gunny sack. Not that it made any difference. He didn't care. Just so that big troopship went grinding past him safely, that was all. Jimmy almost would have been glad to see her doing so, slipping away to sea without him on the way to the great war, with all the fellows snug in their berths, and leaving him to be fished out by some dirty fishing boat below.

"Someone ought to see me, or hear me," he argued, and then he realized that the mine and its deep anchors traveled slowly, lagging and dragging in current and eddy; and he probably had not gone far from the scene of the first disaster.

He was musing on this, trying to get his strength for another shout, when slowly there came to his ears the low, slow churn of a propeller

somewhere. Staring about, he listened. Yes, it was upstream! A steamship, too, without doubt, swinging grandly on in the wide fairway, the lookouts and the river pilots sure of their bearings, able to see the shore marks everywhere, slipping down to where the pilots would climb over the side and wave her on to "Somewhere in France." And perhaps those documents that the Intelligence people had entrusted to Jimmy were not of vital importance. If they had nothing except some reports on the scattered mine fields, for instance, why, the transport would not be held for one missing infantry corporal, certainly not. And when that thought entered Jimmy's mind he went "right up in the air"—he determined to stop the troopship whether she lay in danger of the drifting mine or not.

Now he was sure it was the troopship. Closer and closer came the throb and thresh of engines and propeller; and once a hoarse whistle lifted grandly over the fog. She was forging ahead unfearing and secure, and presently Jimmy was startled by picking up, against the gray mists, the black bulk of her far upstream.

He scrambled to his knees with a cry. She

wasn't half a mile away now and licking it up at perhaps fifteen knots an hour, which was all allowed in the river.

"Coming!" gasped Jimmy, and he stared fascinated at the growing shape in the mists. He could not tell where her course would take her, but if she was following the bend of the current she was not going to pass him far, if at all.

"Pass? She'll ride over this old drift like it was a feather! And then——" he stared down at the boil of water over the mine hung in some deep protruding limbs of the big tree. "Well, if she didn't explode it, even, where'd I be? Got as much chance as a lame canary at a cat show!"

A dim gleam of a green starboard light came to him now. That was good, that meant she would pass to the right of him and his deadly roost if she held the course. Then a high bow light twinkled. And then something showed that sent Jimmy yelling and staggering to his feet with horror. The red port light careened slowly into view.

There they were, the three of them, with a high mast light above, against the roll of black

smoke from her funnel. That meant she was *head on*—coming swiftly down upon the mine beneath the driftage! A sunken log would mean nothing, even if the pilots saw it; even Jimmy, waving his arms madly, would hardly be visible in time to swerve the transport.

But Corporal May of B Company, thinking of his comrades asleep down between decks and the hundreds more of the battalions, felt himself grow cold as ice. He stood upright, still as an iron man for a moment, swiftly trying to figure out if the trooper was square in the rush of that current. And when he made out the great anchors swung below her eyes, and the outlines of her deep-lying hull, he pulled off his hat, braced his feet on the slimy log and began to shout coolly, methodically, with all his lungs and strength, and with his right hand he slipped the Army automatic from its holster and began to fire deliberately straight at the top of the bulky bow.

"Rouse 'em!" he roared. "Ahoy, there!" Then he shifted the barrel of the big forty-five with its waterproof cartridges, aiming straight at the lookout's nest above the bridge: "Wing

'em! Hard over, there! Hard—over—o-oh, you fools!"

The black hull, rolling up a yellow wave around her bows, seemed fairly climbing on top of him now. There was a cry somewhere, very faint to Jimmy. He was dancing up and down, waving his hat, firing his last cartridge, whooping out despairing cries.

And then the troopship crashed right out of the thin haze upon him. He seemed to feel rather than see the black shadow of her, and then, as he went backwards into the water from the mighty surge of her port bow, he caught one glimpse of the red side light, and men staring down.

The next minute he was buried in the yellow whirls of the Father of Waters, and blindly struck out to get away from the thresh of the big propellers. It was, or seemed, minutes before he could clear his eyes, and knew that he was swimming desperately in the huge waves from the troopship's wake.

But there she was two hundred yards downstream, and even while her whistle sounded four hoarse blasts, Jimmy knew that she was revers-

ing at full speed. Men were shouting from the stern rail; he saw them bobbing about the quarter davits as the ship swung off sternwise to port.

But Jimmy struck out for the first bit of driftwood he saw in the rough water. He felt strangely tired and weak. Fifty feet from him now he saw the white trunk of the old sycamore toss out of the foam and fall back, and rise and fall again, dragging at its deadly burden.

And he was hanging to this driftage, silent and nerveless, when the first boat's crew spotted him, and swung a hook into his shirt. They dragged him in, and presently let him sit up, weakly, when the boat had been brought back alongside. When they got him on deck, Jimmy staggered away from the sailors and sat down. An infantry officer of the deck guard was hurrying up, and Corporal May recognized him and saluted. A trim lieutenant of C Company he was, and a new West Pointer, and Jimmy didn't feel he could explain as he might to his own B Company family.

He coughed more dirty water out of his lungs,

and by that time he did see a B Company officer, his own bronzed, gruff captain.

"Corporal May! What's this—you went overboard?"

"Overboard, sir? No, I never got a chance, sir. I—Captain Doyle sent me to rejoin the regiment at Pilot Town with dispatches, sir. Here, sir——" Jimmy fished a wet packet out and held it forth. And then, from among the staring infantry officers and ship's officers, a man came rushing aft.

He was the extra pilot, and he had been having several kinds of fits upon the bridge where his mate was handling the ship.

"What's this? Shootin' at us, he was. Rose up in the middle of the blamed river, yellin' and firin' his gun from a blamed old drift log!"

"Log?" murmured Jimmy, and he looked this civilian over with vast contempt. "That log, sir" —and he turned to his senior officer—"that log was contact mine, No. 38, loose from the left shore field, as maybe might be explained in this report, sir. I don't know, sir; but I do know that the ship was coming bow on top of me—and *it*. I had to turn 'em, sir—just *had* to!"

The regular officers were regarding Corporal May with something like speechless incredulity. The extra river pilot was turning slightly pale under his weather-beaten skin.

"Did you turn her a bit off, sir?" muttered Jimmy.

"Pilot Barry did—about half a point, just on a chance. We couldn't make out what the trouble was, but he gave her a bit of a swing to —starboard."

"O-oh—Jiminy!" groaned Corporal May, and he swung dizzily to the rail. "A bit of a swing—oh—oh!"

"Mine?" growled the pilot. "Well, I'm leaving you here, and I'll report, and the harbor people will go comb that thing out. You fellers can beat it on to France."

"Exactly so," said Jimmy's Captain laconically; "and with Corporal May on board. Report to your quarters, sir—and the doctor. And Mr. Pilot—be careful of what you do with *your* report. This is one of those stories that couldn't get by a military censor!"

"I hope not," murmured Corporal May, as he saluted and turned down the companionway to

the warm quarters below. "It would look sort of foolish for the Army. And, oh, how tired I am—and contented!"

He swung along among the jostling, laughing infantrymen who had not yet become accustomed to the crowded quarters below decks, and along with stowing their stuff, were indulging in much banter. Every man of them was happy with excitement, rookies and five-year men alike, for the "big day" had come.

"Hello, Corporal Jimmy," Corporal Boyd yelled across from his squad section. "We sure thought we'd lost you—and B Company would be no good whatever without your smiling mug. Where you been, Rookie?"

Jimmy laughed pleasantly. His old nickname of border days still stuck to him, for he had refused a promotion to a sergeantcy the last week of his stay on American soil, and his old squad was puzzled, but appreciative. It was just because he liked his gang too well, it appeared; and the adventure and the freedom of the ranks.

"Where you been, Corporal?" yelled Perkins joyfully, as Jimmy tore away at his kit bag for

dry clothes, "tryin' to swim ahead of this outfit —beat us into the big game as usual?"

"Right-o!" said Jimmy, "and isn't it great to be started at last?"

CHAPTER XII

THE SHORES OF FRANCE

IT was several days before Jimmy recovered from his adventure in the muddy Mississippi passes, and he laid off on sick call for the first time in his two-years' service. But forty-eight hours' keeping to below-deck quarters took the edge off the shock and chill, and one beautiful morning he came up to report for the setting-up exercises, and found the troopship slipping on over the sparkling sea, one of a long line of transports whose smoke plumes trailed off to the breeze. It was Corporal May's first sight of the real big blue water, and he stifled another sigh of content.

"Great!" he murmured to Perkins, idling for a moment at the rail, "look at this gang of landlubbers sniffing it up! B Company hasn't got the Mexican border dust out of its lungs yet! They're going to work, these buckies—work their passage for Uncle Sam—setting-up, deck drill,

boat drill—not to mention a few little lectures on what we're going to get over there."

"Lead us to it," said Perky, "and they're going to detail some of us up to the tops on lookout duty when we get near the war zone."

Private Perkins cocked a critical eye aloft at the foretop of the leaden-hued *Aldebaran;* smoke-gray she was from load-line to lookout top, and her name had been painted out to the same smudge, but she looked like the prettiest vessel afloat to Private Perkins and Corporal May, for she was taking them to the Big Adventure of their young lives.

"There's the assembly," grunted Jimmy, "now fall in, you, for I sure want to see a lot of border doughboys on their sea legs. As for that crow's nest work, it's no place for a fat warrior like you, Perky."

And then came days of novel work and duties ashipboard for the landsmen until the time drew near where, somewhere out on the broad Atlantic, the convoy with its watchful cruisers was met by the lithe, gray destroyers of the American patrol. And the fellows thrilled at last, rookies and five-year service men alike.

They were nearing the dreaded hunting grounds of the German submarines, and every man knew that the enemy would be on the lookout for the gray fleet carrying Uncle Sam's fighting men to France. But the days that followed were much like the rest, until, one afternoon, when the weather had blown up to something like a gale, Corporal Jimmy May was ordered to report to his company headquarters.

"You'll take your trick with McClane in the top tonight, sir," said the senior captain briefly. "The ship's officers will turn in your assignment to duty, so be ready to stand watch. That is all, sir."

Jimmy looked over the stocky, whiskered old sailor to whom he was detailed, and Mr. McClane looked at him.

"All right, sir," put in Jimmy blithely, "I'll try to be a rough weather bird!"

He went back to the mess call in the snug quarters below, while the big ship rose and rolled in the seas. It was long after midnight when the orderly awakened him, and Jimmy crawled out of his hammock in the dim-lit quarters. Then he had coffee and went forward to step

out of the companionway to the deck, closing the iron door swiftly, lest a gleam of light betray the ship to some U-boat trailing off the convoy's flank.

Off to starboard, the small hawk-like destroyers plunged on to ward off just this peril, but always there was the chance of the merciless enemy breaking through.

"Might now, mightn't they?" muttered Jimmy to the grizzled bo'sun, McClane, as he pushed against him in the dark. "How soon are we going up? Right away?"

"Right away, lad!" the old Scotsman retorted, "and if there's any sport abroad tonight we ought to get it. The moon'll be coming up, I'm thinking, on our watch, a bit after two o'clock, and it'll cut this muck a bit for us."

"Yes, and for them, too!" laughed Jimmy. "This is a new game to me. Never was on a big ship in my life until I came over!"

"Been sick yet?"

"Not yet! Felt pretty queer the first two days, though."

"If you can stand the top on a night like this, ye're a sailor." Then the old transport service

man looked Jimmy over carefully. Not that he could see anything, but his horny hands were feeling over the sheepskin facing of the collar on Jimmy's service overcoat.

"You'll do," the old man muttered. "The ship's officers are putting you soldier men up in the top because young eyes are good eyes, and a lot of our transport crew are hardly sailors themselves. And yer military officers thought the experience would harden you up a bit—and the weather will, too, boy!"

"I'm keen for it. We're pretty crowded down on the main deck, and I'm tired of hearing the fellows bawl songs all the time; and giving 'em setting-up stuff in those cramped quarters. Since the sea roughed up today we couldn't get in any sort of drill and, besides, a lot of 'em are mighty sick. They won't let a fellow above decks at all now, at night."

"If they knew we was in the danger zone it might interest 'em a bit." McClane was buttoning his great collar tighter, and then he looked at the illuminated dial of his watch: "We got three minutes, boy, before we report to the deck officer. It's strange, mon, but it was a night like

this, and I was standing just abaft this spot on the *Protean,* gassing away with my boy, when she was struck."

"Struck?" cried Jimmy. "Say, have *you* already been torpedoed?"

"Was I? Standing right about here when they took us for'ard of the engine room. Off the Irish Coast it was, when the *Protean* was out from Halifax with a war cargo and one battalion of Canadians from Winnipeg. My boy, Robbie, was a corporal, too—a lad built like you, and with a laugh like you, mon. That's why I took to you at the first—just on account of my Robbie."

The old merchant sailor said no more, and Jimmy was silent. He felt he should not ask of Robbie, and he wanted to know. So he answered finally, gently and indirectly:

"And the boats—did they pick you up all right?"

"Got me down all right from the stern to the second officer's boat—there were most of 'em saved well enough. But some—the engine-room crew was hit bad down there, and the ship didn't float twenty minutes. That's where Robbie did

just what you'd 'a' done, boy. The minute that torpedo hit, Robbie jumped forward and below like a flash to get some of those fellows out if he could—the wounded ones choking and dying in the steam and smoke. And he got the second engineer up and overboard, too! But Robbie—I'm thinking he's still alive, you see."

"Alive?"

"It was this way. All the boats were accounted for except the third officer's. And two months later, on Queenstown dock, I heard that this boat, which we all thought lost, had been picked up by an old tramp bucket trying to make some Norway port; and before she did it she was bumped off by a German raider. But the Huns took everybody off her, so if Robbie was in that third officer's boat, he's in a German prison camp today somewhere."

The old man stopped again awkwardly, and Jimmy muttered his sympathy and hope. It was a long, long hope, this for Robbie McClane, the Canadian corporal, but Jimmy wanted the old father to cherish it. Robbie McClane at once seemed to be a bunkie of Jimmy's—a real, live,

flesh-and-blood fellow, and not an unknown and forgotten hero at the bottom of the Atlantic.

"I'll bet he got through!" said Jimmy suddenly, "just bet he did, and if ever——" and then he stopped with a short laugh at the ridiculousness of the idea that he should ever meet Robbie McClane. Out of all the millions and millions of fighting men and imprisoned soldiers of all the nations East and West in the World War, that he should ever run across a cheery, nervy corporal of the Manitoba contingents whom the lonely old father said looked like himself!

"Mebbe!" cried Alex McClane eagerly. "I don't wish you no hard luck, young mon, over there, but if the *Boches* ever get you and you land up in a prison over the Rhine, why you just keep one of your sharp eyes peeled for a lad named Robbie McClane!"

"Sure!" retorted Jimmy, "but let me knock on wood quick! I don't want to miss the fighting finish of this scrap by being captured right off the bat! That would be the worst thing I know of! Robbie'll turn up some time—you see if he doesn't, Mr. McClane!"

The old Scotsman gripped his hand, as the stinging spray cut across the rail over them.

"I do believe you," he said solemnly. "Ye're the first mon to comfort me. Mostly they just say nothing, or shake their heads sorry-like. It was a bad mess in that engine room where Robbie went down again to get another wounded man, the second engineer tells me."

"You wait!" cried Jimmy. "Word'll come some day. Say, there's a searchlight again off to the left!"

"One of yer destroyers poking into something she's suspicious of. It's a black, bad night for everybody, Mister Corporal Jimmy, and ye're going to know what sailorin' is before you get down from the foretop!"

The bo'sun turned slowly to the bridge steps, and Corporal May followed in the slippery dark. He saw the faint, far shaft of light again rise and sweep and vanish. It was a lot of comfort to know that off there, smashing through the seas on each side, were the American destroyers, and that the Navy lads—as young, alert and eager as himself and his comrades of the Infantry—were ceaselessly watching, ready to sacrifice

themselves to save the big convoys with their thousands of soldiers. That was their trick, and to get the Army over safely would be the Navy's triumph over the Kaiser and the War Lords. As big and important as winning any battle on sea or land.

"I pass it to 'em," murmured Corporal May, as he stopped just outside the bridge house, into which Mr. McClane had gone to get his orders for the third watch in the fore-lookout top. "Pretty fierce on this big old tub; but off on those destroyers rolling in these seas! Say, I'm glad I'm in the Infantree!"

The dimmest sort of a glow came from the binnacle light in the chart room. Through the glass doors Jimmy could see Mr. McClane in converse with the navigating officers of the transport service, and a Naval lieutenant, and with them was Major Chafin, commanding Jimmy's own battalion. Out on the spray-lashed bridge, port and starboard, were keen-eyed sailors; and aft in the lookout top and on the gun platform were other ceaseless watchers. The Naval gun crew would stick right at its station from now on until the shores of France lifted above the horizon, for

at any moment, any second, the hail might come that a periscope was sighted, and quick as the telephonic order could flash aft the five-inch rifles would swing on the designated spot and pump shells at the U-boat's supposed location. To ride and storm them down with a hail of quick-firers, shells from the convoy, and the destroyers, dashing swiftly in from the outer fringe of the guarded area, was the chief reliance of the troop-ship fleet. To dodge or zigzag from the line was risky business when the strung-out transports were plunging on without lights or signal, trusting to their vigilance and measured speed to keep from crashing upon one another in the darkness. It was like a lot of schoolboys rushing down a dark hall, Jimmy thought, trying to dodge the one who was "it" in the game.

Mr. McClane came bustling out of the chart room door, and shouted to Jimmy:

"Aloft, boy! Follow close to me to the rigging and swing up close. She'll swing and wallop around a bit, but everything's lashed fast, so all ye got to do is keep going!"

Back the old man went to the shrouds, and he was up the taut ratlines before Corporal May

could grope his path awkwardly along the deck past the ventilators. He had just got his hands to the rigging when *swash*—a big sea broke well over the port side and banged him from head to foot.

"Wow!" yelled Jimmy, and clambered hastily upward. It was the first time old Father Neptune had uppercut this young landlubber of a soldier and he didn't like it. When he had swung twenty feet upward he felt himself flying outward in the darkness, and just as he was sure the big trooper was heeling over never to come back, she changed her roll, steadied an instant, while every stay and cable around him seemed loosening and groaning—and then she went over the other way, and Jimmy was flopped wildly against the rigging. He hung like a leech against the ratlines, got his breath and climbed on.

"May be tough up on top, but anyhow, it must be drier!" he gasped, and pushed upward in the dark. Presently he flapped against the mast itself, just below the lookout roost and, feeling above for an opening, he grabbed old McClane's foot. That seemed like an anchorage, and Jimmy drew himself up until he could sit on the

tiny platform. He drew another breath and then, hanging to the canvas side of the lookout, he peered over. He was in a black, dizzy, whirling chaos, and his first thought was the silliness of supposing a man could see anything from this spot. Mr. McClane was kicking Jimmy's shins to get a bracing across the narrow platform, and, as Jimmy tried to move over, the next roll of the ship whirled him loose and clear over on the bo'sun's stomach. He yelled an apology, feeling that the old sailor was testily trying to right himself.

Then Mr. McClane bawled in his ear:

"What's the matter with ye, now? Take the port side, mon, and keep an eye over ahead and sharp!"

"Port?" yelled Jimmy. "If you know which is right or left, forward or aft, I'd like to be informed!"

And he heard the old bo'sun laugh. His big arm swung Jimmy around until the corporal of infantry was hanging with his chin over the wet canvas side.

"Yer eyes'll clear in a minute. Ye'll pick up the skyline and a bit of the seas. And it's light-

enin', mon—moon and daylight, too, presently. Then's when ye got to be sharp. The subs have staggered mony a good ship in weather rough as this! It's not a storm, mon—just a little nor'-easter!"

"Maybe not," grunted Jimmy, as he felt himself slide into the sag of the canvas and speculated on where he would land if it should give way, "but if this isn't a storm it's a mighty good imitation of one! The old Mississip' is rough enough for me!"

After a while he accustomed himself to the truculent roll of the lookout top, got his bracing against the mast and cleats, and a good landsman's hold of the rope stays inside the canvas-walled box. The sensation of being hurled skyward and then dragged down to the seas was still sickening, but he could get his breath anyway.

Then he began to glue an eye off to the grayish dark, and watch a lightening spot on the water off to port, where a distorted after-midnight moon was trying to break through apparently. The wind cut and whistled over him, and the smash of the seas against the ship's bows made such a racket that he ceased trying to speak to

his chief. He could just make out Bo'sun McClane watching ahead and off the bow. A hail from the lookout in this weather would be of little use, but right at McClane's hand was the telephone that led straight to the ear of the chief navigating officer on the bridge. And that official could transmit, without changing his hand, an instant order to the engine room and to the gun captain aft. The forward lookout should get the first sight of a periscope, but, if not, the men on the bridge or the aft watch should. But Jimmy knew it would be a terrible blow to Bo'sun McClane if the forward lookout should miss the first report. So he felt that the old sailor had honored him indeed in choosing him for this duty in the top.

Staring out to the murky water line, hidden now and then in the scud, Jimmy thought he saw a faint, darker object. Then he lost it, but he saw a film of smoke.

"A destroyer," he muttered, and after ten-minutes' watching a glance ahead showed him another smudge in the slowly lightening dark. He stared at that, about to call McClane's attention, and then knew that the old man was scrutiniz-

ing it. Jimmy was glad he had not, for he saw it was the leading troopship. Just a glimpse, but it was mighty comforting to Corporal Jimmy. He felt lost in the vast Atlantic and up in this wind-chilled roost. The fellows of B Company snoozing away warm and snug below decks were far away, and so was home and America and everything he knew and loved. So the glimpse of the lifting stern of the leading transport cheered him immensely. By nightfall the sturdy ship should be following the jubilant destroyers into the port of disembarkation in France, and the first great adventure of the Sammies in the world war would be done triumphantly.

The scud darkened over the moon, and gloom reigned again. Jimmy closed his eyes now and then against the wind, and snuggled his wet neck down in his sheepskin collar. Then he stared out again, his glance roving from the misty, gray billows ahead to a point on the troopship's beam, as he had been instructed. Abaft of that it was the job of the other lookout and the after watch. So Jimmy banged his oilskin cap tighter down over his eyes, and took up the ceaseless vigil ahead again, picking up every yard of the seas

far and near, and bringing his survey abeam and then forward once more.

"Combing 'em out," he murmured. "I guess that's the way the old man is doing it. I reckon a periscope would look like a broom handle sticking up out of the Atlantic, and that would be funny enough to attract notice, wouldn't it?"

Once he saw the faint glow of a searchlight in the mists, and then once he thought he heard a faint boom above the rattle of the wind. He glanced about hastily. Old McClane had lifted his weather-beaten face with new interest. He nodded:

"I'm thinking your Yankee boys laced into something—and little chance the Huns got against those sleek, gray beauties up for'ard and all around us! If no U-boat gets up inside the fringe of destroyers they might as well pack up and go home."

"And tell the Kaiser that there's nothin' doin'!" yelled Jimmy. "Nothin' doin' with Uncle Sammy's Navy on the job! Mr. McClane, now that business is easing up a bit, I'd like to borrow your marine glasses."

"You don't need glasses—eyes like yours, and my Robbie's was!"

"Like Robbie's *are!*" corrected Jimmy softly. "I tell you, don't give up the ship in Robbie's case!"

Old McClane was staring ahead, and said no more. And Corporal Jimmy turned to his own watch. Again he saw the misshapen moon struggle out of the scud and light up a dim path on the wild seas. Then the spot darkened, and then again it broke out up forward on the port bow. Jimmy wished it would hang there. The gallant troopship bowling along at fifteen knots or more would keep that moon path just where everything from her to the last point of visibility would come within his vision, and would ease his job a lot. Still he had to comb out the darker waters ahead and off the beam. He could make out objects on the ship's bow, buried now and then in white foam under the sheets of spray that lashed up to the bridge. Jimmy didn't envy the watchers on the bridge a bit, maddening as was this pitching roost to which he clung. Back of him he caught glimpses of the two great funnels of the troopship with their black smoke slant-

ing off, and through this he saw the dizzy careening of the after-lookout top.

"Say," chuckled Jimmy to himself, "I'm a lucky guy! See what those fellows are getting!"

So he grabbed a firmer hold on the slippery canvassed rope, and stared ahead, then to the dim skyline of black water and seething wave crests just this side of which the battered old moon was now sending a smoky light. And suddenly Corporal Jimmy of the Infantry caught himself gasping. A long, slow wave slid out beneath some object that wavered a moment, then steadied upright in the sea—his broomstick poking right up out of the Atlantic!

He didn't lose a moment in another look. He whirled around yelling, and then fell upon Mr. McClane, late of the S. S. *Protean.*

"There! Off there! See? What's that?"

"Mon alive!"

The chief lookout gave one glance into the moon path on the waters. Jimmy whirled to watch the spot. Merely one faint glimpse of the shadowy, upright object perhaps three hundred yards off to port, visible an instant in the

lighted area, and then gone into the darker waters.

McClane gave one shout from the crow's nest, and then he scrambled around at his telephone. And the ship was lunging over in the trough of the seas just then, a sudden new movement that loosened his hold on the stays. The big Scotsman came rolling down upon Corporal Jimmy, jamming them both against the canvas side.

Then he was up on his knees, roaring at his companion.

"Down to the bridge, mon! I broke the telephone off short with that jerk! Down, and hail 'em! Mind—it's broad on the port bow by now!"

And he was up, roaring his hail again down to the bridge watch.

But Jimmy knew instantly that in the gale and smash of the seas down there the outside men might not get it. He fairly hurled himself through the opening in the crow's nest, down upon the swaying shrouds, and was off. He didn't stop to put foot upon the holds; he just dropped himself hand over hand, his body flying out in the terrific roll of the ship, and then flop-

ping against the rigging. And every moment he wondered if he would not hear the tremendous burst of a torpedo against the hull.

Down, down, with the rough wire of the shrouds cutting his hands, flopping and spinning, taking a foothold and then afraid that this would delay his descent. Twice he tried to yell, but had no breath for this. When he saw the wet, dim deck below, he took a desperate chance on the remainder of the distance and jumped, landing on his feet, fell to his knees, and then with a lucky pitch of the ship, he slid headlong onward until, as he grasped at something to regain his feet, he was almost at the iron ladder leading to the bridge.

Then he was up and another moment he crashed into the door of the chart house. Jimmy took another slide that landed him staggering among the group of officers about the steersman.

"Submarine! Broad on the port bow!" roared Jimmy. Then, as they stared at this wet apparition, he roared again. "McClane says so! Top telephone broke, but *he* says so!"

And then the bridge lookouts on either side began to bawl things that were unintelligible to

landsman Jimmy. He just hung up against the window casing, repeating McClane's hail, and then pleading personally to the truth of it. And he heard a quick, snappy order from the chief navigator to the steersman, and another officer was shouting down a speaking tube, and another one working some mysterious device.

The naval lieutenant and Jimmy's major were dashing out. Jimmy recovered his breath and followed, he didn't know just where, but he found himself out on the port side of the bridge where the lookout was gesticulating wildly, pointing and yelling to the hurrying officers. And Corporal May knew that things were happening. The troopship was swinging in a short plunge to starboard to bring her stern squarely upon the invisible enemy, and lessen the breadth of its target, as well as give play to the already waiting gun crew.

And a signal rocket went up somewhere amidships, a bomb flare that swept in a beautiful arc up over the sea, and then burst some hundreds of yards off the port beam. Almost at the same time came the muffled roar of the stern quick-firer on the *Aldebaran,* and then another some-

where further behind, where the gun crew of another ship had picked up the possible location of the hidden enemy. Jimmy was staring at a welter of waves under the unearthly light of the slowly descending rocket flare. He saw a fountain of white water arise, and then another and another, as the Naval gunners showered five-inch shells upon the spot. A searchlight was playing on the water also from the ship astern, and presently another from a greater distance, as a swift destroyer turned in from the outer screen to dash upon the enemy.

"Pretty work!" gasped Jimmy. "Oh—fine! Fill the old brute full of suds! Splash her up!"

He found himself grasping the coat of the port lookout on the bridge, and that wet, slippery seaman turned an astounded face to the infantry corporal.

"She's comin'!" he yelled, "broad on the port quarter! Watch her come!"

He pointed, and Jimmy saw something now that made him stop, and his heart seemed to stop with it. With the sailor he swung far out over the port bridge rail to fix fascinated eyes on the trail of the launched torpedo. Brighter, steadier

every second, the dreaded thing grew out—a phosphorescent gleam under the waves like a swift shark. At the far end of the torpedo's wake the shells were striking in a hail of jetty fountains, but Jimmy's glance was eating up the nearer distance. The front end of that light was traveling for the stern of the *Aldebaran* as if a magnet drew it.

Tighter and tighter the big ship swung in her arc as the wheel was jammed hard over. It was only a matter of seconds and of yards now, and Jimmy was conscious of the tense stillness that seemed to reign on the bridge about him. Only astern the Naval gun kept snarling out its shots upon the foe. Then the watchers on the fore bridge lost sight of the torpedo, as the side of the ship heaved over its trail.

"She'll strike!" gasped the lookout, "fair astern—rip us from end to end out of the water!"

"She's coming!" yelled Jimmy, "there—right alongside! Right on *past* us!"

And they saw the dreaded phosphorescent gleam now almost under them, not ten yards from the ship. On and on, buried by waves and then

clear as a shining fish—but flashing on harmlessly alongside the bow until it was lost in the distance.

The lookout was scratching his head, then fanning himself with his slicker hat. He tried to grin. Jimmy heard a wild, nervous cheer aft all along the troopship's side. Jubilant shouts from officers who suddenly felt limp as dish rags. A dark, burly form came waddling on from the bridge steps. Apart from the group in the chart house the officers had all rushed aft to various points of duty. The Naval gun kept up its cheerful barking, joined by others, and now, in the searchlight's glare, Jimmy saw the gray, indistinct body of a destroyer riding down over the skyline to port.

A spurt of fire poured from her forward guns. But Jimmy May found himself grasped by the huge paws of Alex McClane, naturalized Scotsman of the U. S. Army transport service, once of H. M. S. *Protean.*

"Broomsticks, eh—mon! By the gleam of the oil we just caught off there in the shell spray, I'm thinking we got that U-boat just where it hurt! And that makes up for the *Protean*—ex-

cept Robbie—and I'm glad that a lad that looks like him discovered the beast. You, Mister Corporal Jimmy, and yer askin' me did they look like broomsticks! We certainly got that sneakin' broomstick!"

"It's almost a pity, Mr. McClane," retorted Jimmy. "I'd like 'em to go back and report to the Kaiser that the Americans are here—the Regular Infantree!"

"Ye'll be anchored in a port of France this night," said Bo'sun McClane, "and ye might send the Kaiser word that the Sammies have landed—except that things like this don't get past the censor."

And at nightfall of that day, steaming slowly along inside a double line of French and American destroyers, the troopships came off an unnamed port of France and anchored, still under close guard. The watchful searchlights from the convoying cruisers and the warships in the harbor did away with all danger until later, one by one, the transports were moved in, and berthed at the points of disembarkation, along the great stone quays. There were many hours' delay ere the first of the regiments of Regulars

were marched ashore, and off to the temporary billets designated for their stay before being sent to the training camps. But every man was busied on the *Aldebaran,* and Corporal May had his sturdy squad out, tidied from campaign hat to marching shoes, and waiting along the rail in the company column of twos, for the word that would send B Company down the plank to the soil of France.

They were a grimly contented lot of fellows, was B Company, well-fed, well-clothed, keen-eyed and ready for the great adventure; and Corporal Jimmy May had anew his jubilant sense of belonging to something very wonderful, and that was the army of America going forth to battle, not for a foot of soil belonging to another people, or a dollar's profit for his country back across the sea, but solely for the just and right ideals of peace and liberty which must rule the world.

It was all very clear and very beautiful, and Jimmy felt that down in their hearts every soldier felt it this morning, just as he did, and that was the reason they were so quiet, and yet so evidently and confidently happy. It was some-

thing worth while, a war splendidly worth all the toil and sacrifice that was ahead for him and his comrades.

His old bunkies of the Mexican border, Eddie Perkins and Rube Tolliver, were by him, and they were all staring out over the gray roofs and huge cobbles of the quaint port town, the crowds of cheering people beyond the lines, and all the hubbub and orderly confusion of the wharves nearer where the first regiments had already landed, and were formed in column. Then he saw the colors of his loved regiment, the old, splendid regiment which his own father had commanded years ago, and to which he had given two years of his own young life.

Jimmy wouldn't have traded his job just now for anything in all the world, and when he saw the Stars and Stripes moving now past the regimental colors, as the first column got under way and pressed on up the streets among the crowds, he unconsciously saluted from the ship's rail. Private Perkins noticed this, and turned with a confiding grin:

"Say, Corporal Jimmy! That's the way I feel. Once in a while a fellow finds himself sa-

lutin' that flag without thinkin', don't he—not because it's the time when the regulations call for it, but just because—oh, well, he just does it *himself,* because something's inside him!"

"Yes," said Jimmy, "you said it. Just feeling it *inside.* Along with you—you buckies that I've messed with so long—and all the rest. I'm going to tell you fellows something. They had me up awhile ago to talk to me."

Jimmy made a careless gesture forward, and Perky stared.

"Had you up? Say, what you been doing now? They're shakin' up the N. C. O.'s, and the gang said here's where Jimmy May goes up after turnin' down his sergeantcy twice just to hang along with us."

"That's it, Perky," retorted Corporal Jimmy, "only they called me up and indulged in some fancy talk about what I'd done and all; the Colonel himself, bucky, yes, sir—the Colonel. Wanted me to take an assignment at the training camp that would put me in a second lieutenantcy at the end of eight weeks. No doubt of it, said the Colonel—no doubt at all! I'd go into the first-line trenches against the Boches as an officer.

And Perky, I just got my old foolish feeling about this bunch. I thanked the Colonel and told him I'd rather wait a bit. I wanted to start in the big war right down in the line. Plenty o' room at the top, Perky, but I want to see it all as I go up. Understand, you buckies?"

"Exactly," murmured Private Perkins, "it's just like you."

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